THE PROSPECTS OF STATE DIRECTED REFORM IN EDUCATION

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The problem. To improve policymaking in Iowa, the intent of this study was to inform legislators and others in the policy process about the implementation of this state's accountability legislation. This study was one of seven funded by the FINE Foundation in support of this goal.

Specifically, the problem was to analyze factors that assisted in translating policy mandates into action at the local level. The perceptions of those responsible for implementing were described and recommendations made for future educational policy design.

Procedures. Qualitative methodology was chosen because of the contextual perspectives it provides. Twenty-seven teachers, administrators, and board members were selected from three active school districts and asked five research questions. Through open-ended interviews and document review, the role of implementation variables and policy consequences were analyzed to develop conclusions, implications, and recommendations.

Findings. Six themes emerged from the interviews and document reviews. They included: (a) a culture of local change that existed prior to the state policy; (b) perceptions of policy intent; (c) how the policy impacted the school; (d) barriers to implementation; (e) unintended consequences of the policy; and (f) recommendations to legislators.

Conclusions. Six conclusions became evident: (a) the intent of HF 2272 was decidedly unclear; (b) all of the districts in this study were beneficiaries of prior leadership in change; (c) regardless of intent, the policy increased bureaucracy and decreased professionalism; (d) the policy failed to increase citizen participation; (e) the policy redefined success; and (f) if legislators intend to provide continuous improvement in Iowa education, they need to be more attentive to their policy-making role.

Recommendations. Recommendations to policymakers included: (a) don't abandon schools: create feedback systems between statehouse and the schoolhouse; (b) create a legislative response to accommodate the varying capacities of Iowa schools; (c) increase the likelihood of long-range planning or turn the responsibility over to someone who can; (d) honor capacity where it exists and create capacity where it does not exist.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Policy-maker's search for greater accountability

in public school performance has been constant

from the beginning of publicly funded schools.

Harrington, 1993

The broad question of this study was to explore implementation of the education accountability legislation known as Iowa House File 2272. To understand how a policy implementation study might be approached, it is helpful to use a model that can follow a policy through the various stages of its lifespan. The development of policies can be seen as three phases (Rist, 2000). These phases include policy formation, policy implementation, and policy accountability.

Policy formation is known as the first phase and focuses on the crafting of the policy by the legislature. This phase results in a set of broad goals. During the second phase, policy implementation, directions are developed to create activities, programs, and rules. The final phase is policy accountability. Accountability can only occur when the policy has been in effect for a significant period of time. This passage of time allows results to be gathered and assessed.

HF 2272 was passed by the Iowa legislature two years prior to this study. At the time of this study, HF 2272 had not been in effect long enough to provide meaningful student results. However, implantation procedures were well underway across the state. This study

attempts to describe the implementation stage of Iowa's accountability mandates through the eyes of those who had the responsibility to implement it, educators in the field.

Context of the Study

Federal intervention into public education systems is prominent in state and national headlines and policy discussions. Historically, the federal government has felt an obligation to become involved in public education. Examples of this intervention include the exclusion of women, minority groups, and most recently, students with disabilities from the educational system. In these instances, the role of the federal government is to provide equity for all citizens. To remedy these inequities, the federal government developed programs such as Chapter 1. This monetary entitlement was deemed necessary to promote equity among disadvantaged learners. Chapter 1 also demonstrated the federal government's power, through threats of cancelled funding, to force reallocation of state and local funds (Hill, 2000).

Specifically, in 1983, *A Nation at Risk* was published during the Reagan administration. This report was issued by the National Commission of Excellence in Education and warned that American education was unfocused and not competitive internationally. In an attempt to rectify this problem, federal funding was used to leverage improvement from the states. States were mandated to develop state standards addressing student competencies. The federal government argued that the purpose of state standards and associated evaluation system would improve schools and hold them accountable for federal funding streams, such as Chapter 1, Drug Free Schools, and others.

In response to the mandates, educational reform became the major state policy activity of the 1980s (Fuhrman, 1999). Underlying this activity was the transfer of much of the spending and responsibility for education from the federal government to the states. Evidence of this shift is found in the sheer volume of legislation dealing with teacher certification and compensation during the 1980s.Virtually every state enacted policies to reform teacher education, licensing, and compensation in this period (Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1985). The reforms signaled a surge in state activity at a time when the federal government was retiring from policy initiation and reducing educational spending. This interchange of federal and state educational roles resulted in Goals 2000 Legislation during the Clinton administration. This federal legislation held the states more accountable for improvements in student performance or risk the loss of federal funding. This legislation also supplied state with some flexibility in implementing the mandates.

It is within this complex environment that Iowa has acted as a final "holdout' to the Goals 2000 mandates. The status resulted from Iowa's long history of local control. Iowa resisted federal mandates by advocating self-determination for each school district. Iowa wanted local districts, not the state, to choose the manner in which they would create standards and the assessments designed to measure compliance. Therefore, Iowa became the only state without statewide performance standards as the accountability measure of student achievement. But, Iowa was not immune from national and state policy networks (Wirt & Kirst, 1997). Predictably, the federal government began to leverage Iowa's compliance with threats to withdraw federal funding. Gradually, Iowa's increasing compliance was evident in the development of Section 280.12 and 280.18 of the Iowa Code during the 1980s. These additions to the code called for goal setting and improved student achievement (Iowa

Department of Education, 1998.

http://www.state.ia.us/educate/programs/ecese/28012_letter.html). Again, in 1998, the Iowa General Assembly further addressed accountability by passing Iowa House File 2272. HF 2272 mandated accountability for student achievement be incorporated into state education standards and accreditation processes. School improvement plans had also to be developed. However, Iowa still refused to mandate statewide academic standards for preK-12 education. Instead, Iowa was unwavering in its desire to keep school districts at the center-point of the decision making process by allowing local development of standards. As a result, much of the responsibility for success laid in successful implementation at the local level. This approach was rooted in Iowa's history of local control, but untested in the face of new accountability mandates. In short, Iowa presents the opportunity to study a state where policy mandates to improve schools were inserted into a culture of jealously guarded local control.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to provide information to state policymakers and those who directly influence policy regarding what happened during the implementation of a policy intended to improve Iowa schools. The intent was to make available information and informed judgments concerning not only what happened but also what implementers would recommend for future policy design. This study also offered insight to other implementers concerning how three leading districts took on the job of implementing policy.

Problem of the Study

The problem of this study was to describe and analyze the resources and processes used by three active Iowa middle schools. The perceptions of those responsible for implementing the mandates was also described and analyzed regarding the general impact of that legislation on administrative and instructional practices of the schools. Recommendations regarding future educational policy designs were also recorded.

Research Questions

1. How familiar were middle school practitioners with House File 2272?
2. What did House File 2272 require schools to do?
3. What was the expertise and interest of school personnel responsible for implementation of the effort?
4. What strategies were school administrators and teachers using to transform House File 2272 into practice?
5. What were the suggestions of middle school practitioners to improve policy and implementation of HF 2272?

Definition of Terms

The terms listed below are defined to enhance the clarity for the reader:

Active Use is defined by Fuhrman, Clune, and Elmore (1991) as "acting in advance" of the mandate or "responding in a manner that exceeds the minimum."

AEA is the abbreviation for the Area Education Association. There are 15 AEAs in Iowa designed to provide school improvement assistance as well as educational media and special education services to local school districts.

CSIP is the abbreviation of the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan. This is a five-year plan prepared by each district to describe how increases in achievement for all students will be accomplished. The plan is required by HF 2272 (Iowa Department of Education, 1999, http://www.state.ia.us/educate/programs/ecese/28012_letter.html).

Ed-Flex is a process outlined in the 1990s' reauthorization of ESEA that allows states to waive some federal program requirements in order to increase student achievement through state and local incentives (Adams & Kirst, 1999).

ESEA is the abbreviation for Elementary and secondary Education Act. It is the federal.accountability mandate that requires states to set challenging standards for students (Adams & Kirst, 1999).

Iowa House File 2272 is the comprehensive school improvement and accountability mandate known as the Accountability for Student Learning Act (House File 2272, 1998).

The Iowa Model is a plan which defines how Iowa will meet the intent of ESEA while attempting to preserve the local control of schools.

SIAC is the abbreviation for School Improvement Advisory Committee. This committee is composed of community members, and AEA representative, teachers, and administrators.

FINE Foundation

The support of the First in the Nation in Education (FINE) Educational Research Foundation in carrying out this study is gratefully acknowledged. This research, in conjunction with three other dissertations, provided a broad-based opportunity for insights into the school improvement policy implementation process in Iowa. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of the FINE foundation and no official endorsement should be inferred.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The lack of public understanding
of policy under conditions of
complexity is at the heart of the
problem of contemporary democracy.

Stone 1985

Introduction

This literature review focuses on the policy-making and implementation strategies that surrounded educational accountability. Of special interest are those federal laws that resulted in the passage of Iowa House File 2272 and the local implementation efforts that ensued. An initial review describes the lessons learned from previous implementation efforts and how policy might be improved as a result. The research focused on "active school districts" it believed would provide clues for successful local implementation. Examining these active districts would provide legislators with an increased understanding of the feedback, policy responses, and capacity building necessary to accomplish the goals of the new law. This evolving environment creates a context for the study's research questions, conclusions, and implications.

The National Focus on Accountability

Teachers and communities have always been concerned about student performance. However, the politics of the 1980s caused the nation to see student achievement as the core purpose of education (Adams & Kirst, 1999). This shift to judging schools based on achievement began with the publication and widespread circulation of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983. *A Nation at Risk* reported unfavorable achievement comparisons to earlier decades and to other nations. The rhetoric fueled public discontent with American Education. *A Nation at Risk* galvanized these concerns by offering evidence of declining standardized test scores. The recommendations called for a national effort to improve standardized testing and achievement scores by creating measurable standards and reporting to its citizens (Hansen, 1991). The report called for educational goals and proficiency testing in grades 4, 8, and 12 (Adams & Kirst, 1999). From this point on, accountability for increasing student achievement became a goal of the government and standardized testing was the measuring stick.

"Policy-maker's search for greater accountability in public school performance has been constant from the beginning of publicly funded schools" (Harrington, 1993). The most recent call for increased educational accountability began with the publication and widespread circulation of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983. *A Nation at Risk* was a federal report initiated by the Reagan administration. Unfavorable achievement comparisons to earlier decades and to other nations fueled public discontent with American education. *A Nation At Risk* galvanized these concerns by offering evidence of declining standardized test scores. The recommendations called for a national effort to improve standardized testing and

achievement scores by creation of measurable standards and reporting to its citizens (Hansen, 1991). The report called for educational goals and proficiency testing in grades 4, 8, and 12 (Adams, Jr. & Kirst, 1999). From this point on, accountability for increasing student achievement became a goal of the federal government and standardized testing was the measuring stick.

The passage of *Goals 2000: Educate America Act,* expanded the role of the federal government and also provided funding in exchange for increased accountability. The *Improving America's School Act* held schools accountable for the achievement of all students, but created some local implementation flexibility through Ed-Flex programming (Adams & Kirst, 1999). States using Ed-Flex options were allowed to design programs with some sensitivity to state preferences and culture. Several states utilized this opportunity to investigate whether federal requirements could blend with ongoing local efforts. Iowa was one such state.

Accountability "The Ioway"

In 1985, Iowa took the first steps toward compliance with the new federal mandates. Iowa Code 280.12 and 280.18 required districts to improve student achievement by adopting goals and assessing progress toward achieving these goals. Iowa districts publicly reported student assessments. Districts were required to report long range planning and develop action plans for implementing improvements. Implementation research indicated that successful change efforts would require external mandates and enough local flexibility to encourage internal buy in and implementation. Iowa policy makers worked to blend these two

requirements. Iowa's recent education laws, specifically HF 2272, were a product of the Ed-Flex provision of the law.

Through Ed-Flex, Iowa negotiated with the United States Department of Education to meet the federal requirements while preserving local input and control. In 1998, Iowa legislators approved HF 2272 *Accountability for Student Learning*. This legislation called for data collection, data analysis, setting of improvement goals, development of standards benchmarks, development and evaluation of comprehensive school improvement plans, assessment of student progress using multiple measures, annual reports to the public, and community involvement (Iowa Department of Education, 1999). The Ed-Flex component of the legislation mandated standards and assessments but blended some local implementation flexibility to develop these standards. Districts were required to use standardized tests as one measure of achievement, but were also encouraged to develop and use multiple measures of student progress.

The Complexity of Accountability Policy Implementation

As policy design is explored, it must be remembered that policy-makers were often operating without benefit of a research base. Elmore (1980) warned that when administrative feasibility is not discussed and accommodated in policy, then the complexity of implementation will almost certainly overwhelm the intent of the policy." In *Educational Policy as an Ecology of Games,* Firestone (1989) cautioned educators not to treat reforms as if educational reform is handed down by some higher power. These reforms were experiments and should be treated as if they were experiments. Firestone further warned of the danger of relying on the uncertainty of all policy implementation:

> This vision weans one away from the images of a single, omniscient, omnipotent policy maker. Instead, it highlights the messiness and discontinuities of the policy process, the variety of games played by different people for different reasons and the loose linkages between those separate games. Policy was a chain of decisions running from statehouse to the classroom. No one was responsible for the whole thing. (p. 23)

Rather than relying on top-down mandates that are inflexible and often punitive, Firestone (1989, p. 23) suggested that "legislators could take advantage of the messiness of the educational policy system. Instead of cleaning it up, realize that constructive, creative approaches might be developed locally." McLaughlin (1987) contended that policymakers cannot mandate what matters. Policy implementation depended on local capacity and will. Capacity was something that policy can address. Conversely, local will reflected an implementer's assessment of the value of the policy. It appeared that making policy is more than putting mandates on paper. Implementation was a complex problem that mixed the intent of the policymakers with implementer's capacity and desire to comply.

The Implementation Problem

Like HF 2272, most education policies have their origin in legislative rules, regulations, and mandates. The education systems these rules and regulations are meant to govern were complex and unlike each other in countless ways (Mazzoni, 1994). As this complexity grows, the connection between legislative intent and administrative action were difficult to follow (Elmore, 1980, p.1). As new policies were implemented, unpredicted ripples, or in some cases tidal waves, moved throughout the education system. Every new variable produces tens of unanticipated reactions and each of those produces tens of reactions

(Fullan, 1993). Elmore (1997) believed that this complexity is probably the most troubling aspect of modern government. Iowa implementation has been no exception.

Elmore (1980) and others called these tidal waves of change the implementation problem. The implementation problem joined the working vocabulary of policy analysts when ambitious, sweeping federal reforms (such as The Great Society), cast these implementation problems in bold relief (McLaughlin, 1987). McLaughlin believed that this problem came as a surprise to analysts. Instead of compliance, policy designers found local implementers idiosyncratic, frustratingly unpredictable, and downright resistant. Cuban (1984) and other political scientists began to seriously question whether these top-down reform mandates could make local schools better. Local control state such as Iowa encountered special difficulty. As a result, acceptance of the mandates at the local level seemed unpredictable or nonexistent in local control states.

The Meaning of Successful Implementation

Concerns over these alleged failures of major legislation of the mid-60s and early 70s led to a rather impressive number of detailed studies of implementation programs in education (Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1980). One such study, Odden and Marsh (1988), contended that implementation research evolved through three phases. Stage one encompassed the aforementioned policies enacted during the 60s and 70s. Policy implementation during this time featured a top-down (macro) implementation style. Little local input was asked or given in policy development. These policies met with resistance at the local level. Local governments had neither the capacity nor the will to implement initiatives designed by the higher level governments (Murphy, 1971). Since few sanctions

existed for noncompliance, these programs resulted in continuous bargaining between higher levels of government and locals (Ingram, 1977). Mistakenly, researchers concluded that bargaining would never end and the programs were destined for failure.

After further study, Odden (1991) asserted that the arguments against top-down implementation were too pessimistic. In fact, the second phase of implementation research began by reinvestigating the outcomes of the policies enacted in the 60s and 70s. Odden's analysis indicated that, after a bumpy initial start-up, compliance with legislative regulations improved. Further, Peterson (1986), found that most government programs eventually become implemented. But realistically, claiming that programs "get implemented is not the same as claiming that they "work" (Odden & Marsh, 1988, p. 44). Local implementers "corrupted" funding for other purposes and bent the mandates to their own purposes. Such top-down strategies are ineffective in managing situations that are in constant flux (Fullan, 1993). Policies were often implemented but did not achieve their original purpose. They were fatally altered by the complexity of local systems.

The focus of stage three research kept the original goal of successful policy implementation, but also added the identification of methods to measure progress toward addressing the original intent (Elmore & Marsh, 1988). To accomplish these dual goals, McLaughlin (1987), suggested adding bottom-up (micro) implementation to top-down (macro) implementation strategies. To support this position, McLaughlin (in Elmore & Marsh, 1988), argues that success of the policy must consider micro implementation to address the complexity of local systems. McLaughlin further suggests emphasis at the lowest level of implementation:

- what is known about effective practice at the service delivery level

- how local practitioners could be influenced to attend to delivery
- make local practitioners expert in the effective practices
- make district, state, and/or federal level policies that force local practitioners to put these practices into use

Fullan (1993) believed that the more to-down mandates and bottom-up forces are coordinated, the more likely that complex systems will move toward greater effectiveness. A sense of the significance of this interaction is gleaned form McLaughlin (1988):

> Macro and micro strategies were linked through professional committees. These communities can embrace, ignore, reject, or undermine goals advanced by Policy reformers. When professional communities misunderstand or contest policy goal, the road to the classroom is difficult. (p. 82)

McLaughlin (1998) challenged other third generation implementation analysts to aggressively explore possible links between macro policy formation and micro policy implementation strategies.

Prescriptive Implementation Research

Fullan, among others, took up the challenge of examining the interplay between micro and macro implementation. Fullan (1991, p. 201) contends that restructuring reforms by focusing solely on micro implementation strategies devolved decision making failed to affect the teaching-learning core of schools. Fullan contends that micro implementation strategies such as shared decision making (SBM) and site-based management (SBM) are ineffective due to fundamental design flaws that include:

- Ample evidence exist that organizations in general are not likely to initiate change in the absence of external stimuli. Schools are not noted for being innovative.
- When schools do have the opportunity to control the change process (as in SBM and SDM), they do not take productive action and are likely to get bogged down or make superficial changes.
- In decentralized systems (as well as centralized systems) it is difficult to discern, much less maintain, quality control.
- Individual schools may become innovative, but will eventually become bogged down by district actions or inactions--hiring decisions, budget, etc.

This research indicates that most schools, left to their own means, do not maintain an inertia toward change. The massive weight of complex institution favors staying in place. Then, for most schools the push to get the organization rolling will not come from the inside.

It becomes apparent that in complex systems such as education, neither macro (top down) or micro (bottom up) implementation can stand alone and be effective. Therefore, Fullan (1994) contends that both theories are flawed, but the solution may lie in the selective use of both theories. Senge (1990) provides the possibility of this compromise when he suggests that simultaneous top-down/bottom-up strategies are essential, due to the complexity of societies and systems. Validation of this view comes from Baker, Curtis, and Benson (1991), who predicted that schools would show "systemic improvement" by blend internal development (micro strategies) and external involvement (macro strategies). They predict that the more that top-down and bottom-up forces are coordinated in schools, the more likely that these complex systems will move toward greater effectiveness. These

effective schools would retain a stable local response to internal capacity as well as developing strong ties to external change efforts.

Implementation Lessons from "Active Schools"

As policy implementation progressed these predictions proved well founded. Studies revealed anomalous responses in certain districts. Unexpectedly, small numbers of districts were found that go beyond the required government mandates and are responded very actively to state policy reforms. On occasion, these districts exhibited a tendency to get out ahead of the new state reforms in a way that distinguishes them from their peers (Fuhrman, Clune, & Elmore, 1991). Firestone (1989) dubbed these districts as "active" in the reform process. Firestone contended that this unusually aggressive response to mandates and inducements is an important one, since it illustrated the extent to which top-down policy implementation seemed dependent on the will and capacity of those at local level. Clues to understanding the interactions of micro and macro implementation strategies at the local level can be found in a study by Fuhrman et al. (1991):

> We found that administrators in these districts saw opportunities in the state reforms to accomplish their own objectives, particularly as the state provides significant funding increases. Local districts are actively orchestrating various state policies around local priorities. Strategically interacting with the state to achieve local goals. Active districts contain personnel who were actively engaged in networks that influence state policy before it is formalized. Several new state programs were modeled after practices already underway in local districts. This increasing sophistication among local actors mean that they increasingly engage in strategic

> interaction with state actors both in responding to and affecting the content of state policy. (p. 209)

Fuhrman et al. (1991, p. 218) also dubbed these local players "strategic interactors." Strategic interactors" seized policy opportunity, coordinated and expanded state policies to meet their needs and anticipated and actively shaped state policy. The significance of these interactors is especially significant in light of Firestone's (1989) assertion that active districts would "respond quite positively if the district interprets a policy as meeting its interests. Conversely, Firestone also notes that active districts could respond negatively to policies that interfere with the current agenda. Interactors then, work to translate policies in a way which blends and compliments ongoing local initiatives to move the district ahead.

In addition to active leadership, active districts were engaged in state of the art staff development planning. In fact, new state programs are occasionally modeled after practices already underway in local districts (Fuhrman et al., 1991). These districts had histories of implementing many different initiatives. This assertion is supported by McLaughlin's (1987) assertion that organizations learn how to innovate by implementing innovations. Action provides a chance to break negative amplifying cycles in organizations. Astuto and Clark (1986) contend that these entrepreneurial organizations always operate the edge of their competence, focusing more of their resources and attention on what they don't know than controlling what they already know.

Developing a Theory of Accountability

Adams and Kist (1999) contend that the purpose of public accountability in a democracy is to protect citizens from the flaws of public agents. This accountability links

democracy and bureaucracy by limiting the actions of these public agents and holds them accountable to citizens. This accountability takes the form of public reporting. Goretz (in Fuhrman, 2001) describes public reporting as the most common form of accountability for public schools. Using this public reporting, citizens can demand improvement in schools or reward education for positive results.

In 1980, Elmore first suggested the development of a feedback loop exists between the various entities involved in policy development and implementation. McDonnell and Elmore (1987) described an intricate but predictive cycle of policy creation, local implementation, analysis of feedback, and policy readjustment. This feedback loop, its data gathering and constant readjustment can form a theory of accountability. This theory of accountability implies that correctly choosing school performance measures, applying the appropriate policy response, and reassessing resulting improvements create a predictable, adjustable cycle of school reform.

The first phase of the feedback loop required the selective collection of data. By choosing the correct feedback to measure school success and understanding the variety of policy responses available, legislators could assist educators to work harder and perform better (Elmore, 1980). Cohen and Hill (2001) emphasized the significance of data collection by policy makers. They contended that:

> Most reformers proceeded as if the nature and effects of those policy experiments Were already established. Few made any serous effort to bring evidence and analysis to bear. They did not hold themselves to the same standards of reflective work as they required from teaches and students. Only collecting the correct assessments and reflecting upon the results would allow policy-makers to enhance schools. (p. viii)

The method chosen to assess results demands the attention of researchers and begs the question, which data do we assess? Current policies favor standardized testing. Adams and Kirst (1999) warn that the vast majority of American schools are not organized so that they can use standardized test results in ways that help them make improvements in teaching and learning. How then, did the focus of accountability become standardized test results?

> The gathering of statistics has existed for over a century. However, the public focus on these statistics is relatively new. Dorn (1998) provides a brief history of accountability derived from standardized tests: Early in this century, statistics were only used internally by schools. Statistical evaluation was absent in the 1940's and 1950's. A debate over SAT score trends developed in the 1960's. *The New York Times* did not start to report SAT scores annually until 1976. No network news broadcasts between 1968 and 1974 reported test scores as the substance of a story; the popular reporting of periodic student data is of relatively recent vintage. (p. 61)

The real surge of standardized test literature and discussion began with the publishing of *A Nation at Risk. A Nation at Risk* initially standardized testing to assess schools, by comparing scores to those of previous decades and other nations. Such tests have been the yardstick for school success ever since. As a result, this philosophy is deeply imbedded in current accountability policies.

Despite their favored status, critics revealed that high stakes standardized tests have a short, untested history. As a result, they were reluctant to gamble the future of education on these results. Popham (2002) gave voice to these criticisms by claiming that norm-referenced test scores reflect three factors: what is taught in schools, socio-economic factors that affect out-of-school learning, and innate intelligence. The inference here appeared to be that

teaching material which will appear on the test, living in an affluent area, and genetic luck of the draw were predominant factors influencing success on standardized testing. These variables ignore goal-setting and other higher order strategies involved in learning. Learning requires students to specify their own capabilities and efforts in order to set and attain reasonable and challenging goals. The target population of the testing (the students) are often the least likely to know what test results mean or how to use them to improve academically.

Likewise, Siroknik (2002) contended:

> Economic factors limit the use of more complex and rich assessments of students Learning. Other than for reasons of economy and efficiency, there is little educational justification for using easily scored tests and only those tests to make high-stakes decisions. They cause narrowing of what gets emphasized to the subjects tested and only in the limited ways they are tested. (p. 665)

Siroknik's work also suggests standardized testing accountability becomes self propagating,

> We never even think about possible alternatives that seem to compromise our ability to aggregate information when tests are pre-eminent, because they can be aggregated. We are no longer honoring the professional judgment of educators as a central and critically important feature of any responsible system designed to demonstrate what students know and are able to do. Ultimately, educators should know more about any given child than any test can tell us. (p. 669)

Berrends, Bodilly, and Kirby (2002) proposed that these typical measurements used in public accountability systems provide very limited indicators of student and school performance. They further criticized the overwhelming emphasis given to scores on state tests as the measures of student improvement do not bode well for reform efforts.

Standardized tests then, did not provide the mechanism for making high stakes decisions for education. Multiple measurements will better address the complexity of learning. However, multiple measures are difficult to aggregate and will also require increased capacity building and expense (Popham, 2002). Why bother to make such an expensive investment in multiple student assessments?

The answer to this question lies in the importance of data collection in the creation of a feedback loop between schools and the legislature. When new policies were enacted or existing policies are examines, data collection is critical in determining the corrective policy response from the legislature. Differing data results required a different response from a menu of possibilities available to legislators. McDonnell and Elmore (1987) described four potential policy responses to data analysis. These four methods included mandates, inducements, system changing, and capacity building. In the next sections, these four alternatives are presented in the language of the researchers. Also, the conditions that favor each alternative were presented.

Mandates created governing rules. Mandates assumed the capacity to accomplish the goals existed within the institution and the use of coercion would improve performance. The goal of mandates is to create compliance. Mandates assumed the required action should be standardized and independent of the differing capacities of schools. Mandates required enforcement and there was no transfer of money as an inducement to comply. Mandates were introduced to create uniform behavior at low cost. The only cost is to create an enforcement agency. This agency became significant as the purveyor of consequences for noncompliance. Unhappily, mandates seldom result in uniform compliance since the last units of compliance usually involve prohibitively high enforcement costs (Stigler, 1971).

The second alternative was inducements. Inducements assumed schools vary in their ability to produce value and the transfer of money elicits improved performance. Inducements were usually followed by rules to ensure money was directed toward the intent. Inducements assumed the capacity existed to produce the requirements if the right incentives are provided. Since districts vary in their capacity level, policymakers must be willing to tolerate variation in the product. There would be no standard product, but improvement was expected at all sites.

A third alternative was system changing. Two conditions fostered a system changing alternative. First, working under existing incentives, institutions could not produce results that legislators wanted. Second, altering the distribution of authority among institutions would significantly change the nature of what is produced. System changing was used for unresponsive schools that failed to address changes in the environment or to new policies. One example of system changing would remove the leadership or staff from a failing school. This process is often called "reconstituting" a school. However, recent research warns that a practice of reconstituting schools by releasing administrators and teachers from failing schools and rehiring shows little hope of improving achievement. Malen and Croninger (2002) warn that their study of reconstituted schools reveals mixed results. Malen and Croninger (p. 128) warn that "for now, we ought to resist temptation to gamble on reconstitution and instead focus on defensible ways to turn around troubled schools."

The final alternative is to capacity building. Capacity building invests in future benefits with the expectation of future enhanced returns. In the short term, only those involved locally are the recipients, while society may benefit in the future. Examples would include "pure science" research. Here, investments in experimental procedures first benefit

the particular recipients of the funding. Later, society may benefit from the research undertaken. Capacity building requires patience and consistent investment in the future. Unfortunately, capacity building is often abandoned when it fails to produce immediate results and legislators became impatient.

The implication is clear, collection of inadequate data and the application of policy response from the legislature can have either a positive or deleterious effect on the lives of educators and others involved in education.

Successful Implementation is Reliant Upon School Capacity

Consequences of Implementing Accountability Policies

Most professions decry the complexity of policy implementation and the paperwork that inevitably followed. However, very seldom were the implications as corrosive to the profession as in education. Tye and O'Brien (2002) explored the impact of new accountability measures on the teaching profession. The implications are profound. In a survey of former teachers, they were asked to list the reasons that impacted their decision to leave the profession. Topping the list were increasing accountability and increased paperwork. Salary considerations did not appear until the seventh place. Those surveyed defined accountability as high stakes testing, test preparation, and standards. Tye and O'Brien (2002) found that it was the work environment itself that ultimately proved unbearable, and the pressures connected to standardized testing were a prominent feature of that work environment. Conversely, when practicing teachers were surveyed, salary considerations moved to the top of the list while paperwork and accountability still sat near the top of the list at second and third. Tye and O'Brien contended that this information

represents a significant shift in the perceptions of public educators. Apparently, the historic view of teachers' lowered attention to salary concerns are not accurate. In addition, teachers would expect higher salaries in return for increased accountability and increased paperwork. Low salaries may also equate to low respect for the profession. Tye and O'Brien contend that this enduring neglect from the public may well be the reason that today's teachers are feeling so unhappy. Perhaps even more significantly, teacher job satisfaction was linked to improvements in student achievement. The philosophical, theoretical, and empirical evidence in support of this model are too overwhelming for it to be ignored. It appeared that a significant component of improving student achievement intertwines with teacher job satisfaction. During a teacher shortage, care must be taken to avoid discouraging teachers even further. Rather, methods must be found to attract and retain graduates to Iowa's dwindling supply of quality educators.

Increasing Capacity Lessens Consequences of Accountability Policies

As Iowa education sits in the middle of a teacher shortage, retention becomes a primary issue for all districts. Tye and O'Brien (2002) assert that building capacity in a teaching staff could promote retention. Studies indicate that most departing teachers were either new to the profession or veterans preparing to retire. Building human leadership capacity may work to curb the exodus of teachers. This theory contended that increased training makes a professional less likely to leave the profession. Doctors and lawyers were examples of professions where the rigors of training make departure unlikely. In this light, building capacity in teaching staff takes a new and significant place in the day-to-day life of a school district. The significance of developing capacity and keeping teacher morale high is

especially relevant in times of great change. Capacity building will enhance teacher retention and student achievement. However, resources and commitment from legislators were not forthcoming. What should the public do about the need for capacity building and the lack of legislative will to enable real change. Sirotnik (2002) emphasized the need to hold legislators and policymakers accountable for providing the funding and capacity building that should accompany their rhetoric. He believes the public should not let education politicians off the hook:

> The gap between what politicians and policymakers say they want for public education and the actual mustering of will, commitment, and resources necessary to do something about it. A responsible ecology of accountability must operate on two fronts simultaneously, the day to day efforts to improve the education of children in schools and the concerted efforts of educators and their constituencies to demand that the political infrastructure dramatically alter its priorities and invest the necessary resources where they are needed most. (p. 671)

Successful Implementation Requires Increased Capacity

Throughout this review, the significance of building capacity repeats itself, over and over. Adams and Kirst (1999) specifically linked capacity and educational accountability. They believed leadership should move toward building school capacity to achieve accountability goals over time. Increased capacity was needed for developing multiple measures of student achievement and long-range improvement. To complicate matters, when asking schools to produce innovation, Berrends et al. (2002) contended that most schools are not fertile ground for break the mold ideas, because they lack capacity. Elmore (1980)

suggested addressing a lack of capacity by delegating control to local implementers. This allows policy-makers to capitalize on complexity at the delivery level.

- Distinguish between the willingness of implementers to comply and the capacity to successfully deliver a service. Implementation depends more on capacity than it does on compliance.
- Focus resources as closely as possible to the point of delivery. Policies designed to improve delivery of services depend heavily on the discretionary choices at the delivery level. Resources must flow to those points in the system where they affect discretionary choices.

When determining how to effectively build capacity in schools, Elmore (1980) offers:

> Teachers will make most of the important discretionary choices in the implementation of a program. So, to be effective policy needs to change what teachers do in the classroom. Education is bottom heavy because the closer we get to the bottom of the pyramid, the closer we get to the factors that have the greatest effect on the programs success or failure. (p. 25)

A key to improvement lies in reaching into individual classrooms. But how do you get into Iowa's classrooms? Teachers are notoriously autonomous about their teaching practices. Cohen and Hill (2001) contend that we must fight the tendency to just shut the door and teach:

> Autonomy is especially corrosive in the United States, where fragmentation, weak knowledge of effectiveness and limited opportunities to learn leave teachers with little consistent and constructive guidance. The closer one gets to practice, the more influential privacy seems and the less collegiality (p. 174).

Teacher isolation, the opposite of teamwork, is one of the most obvious realities of a teacher's life (Lortie, 1975). Lortie also found,

> Individualism combines with presentism (the myriad of daily events and duties) to retard the search for occupational knowledge. Teachers who work in isolation cannot create an empirically grounded, semantically potent common language. Unless they develop terms to indicate specific events, discussion will lack the clarity it needs to enlighten practice. Individualism supports presentism by inhibiting work with others in a search for common solutions. Teachers do not undertake the collegial effort which has played so crucial a role in other occupations. (p. 212)

The negative impact of autonomy was addressed by Schmoker (1999) who believed that professional teaming among teachers was the foundation of enhancing achievement. His work was supported by November (1988, p. 6) who stated, "The best thing to invest in right now is collegiality. The number one skill that teachers will need is to be team-based, collegial, sharing their knowledge and wisdom." Only when teacher share practices, observe and submit to observation will the necessary reflection occur to improve performance. A large advancement in capacity building will begin with the introduction of effective teaming into a school system. Fullan (1991) contended that collegiality among teachers was a strong indicator of implementation success. This collegiality can be measured by the frequency of communication, mutual support, help, etc. Virtually every research study on the topic has found this to be the case. McLaughlin (1998) asserted that teachers must have time to team, so bureaucracies have to work through professional communities to effect deep change. Teachers must have:

> The opportunity to talk together, understand each others' practice and move as a community to visions of practice. If teachers are not learning together, changes in government structures will mean little in terms of student outcomes. Restructure the organizational conditions that support discourse and strong community. (p. 81)

In summation, the school literature is clear regarding the significance of collecting the correct data and presenting responsive staff development. Leaders who build flexible cultures could take advantage of changes in the wind rather than dread them. Increasing capacity of educators allowed them to make the inevitable course adjustments that accompany responses to changing environments. This capacity to grow and change enhanced teacher retention and attracted new teachers to the profession. However, stability and discipline is required to invest in capacity for the long term. A reduction of support will dishearten even the most loyal crew.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

It is not possible to describe or explain

Everything one "knows" in language form,

Some things must be experienced

To be understood.

Lincoln and Guba, 1985

Introduction of Qualitative Methodology

This naturalistic inquiry was based on the theoretical works of Lincoln and Guba (1985). Qualitative methods were chosen to derive a deeper understanding of a system of interactions from the eyes of implementers. Qualitative methodology was especially helpful in uncovering the actual day-to-day operations of complex policy implementation (Rist, 2000). This technique was critical since Iowa's emphasis on local control gave each school district the ability to address the mandates in an unique fashion. In each school setting, dozens of players interacted to interpret and implement policy. Naturalistic inquiry provided a good fit since these diverse outcomes could not be readily anticipated prior to the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 102). Naturalistic inquiry provided the opportunity to examine multiple social realities through the experiences of multiple participants.

Naturalistic research is also my personal preference since, as an educator, I prefer immersion in the everyday life of the participants. My personal training in science deeply acquainted me with positivism. In spite of this training, or because of it, I have come to

prefer the paradigm of naturalism that allows a "deeper look" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 30) at my profession.

Research Design Characteristics

Much of the design of this naturalistic inquiry evolved throughout the course of work. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 225) advised that planning could not be completely "given in advance" but emerged over the course of the study. The type of design must be "played by ear," it must unfold, cascade, roll, emerge (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 208). However, this did not preclude the general outline of a plan at the onset as suggested by Wolcott (1992). The researcher allowed a design to emerge by engaging in continuous data analysis. Every new act of investigation took into account everything that has been learned so far. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 209). The design of the study relied on inductive analyses. This inductive analysis provided the degree of flexibility necessary to give full voice to participants and allowed the formation of common trends and gaps throughout the data. The choice of naturalism also allowed the researcher the flexibility to adjust formats in a manner that allowed informants to tell their story.

The format that ultimately emerged traced its roots to Cresswell (1998). Cresswell envisioned a circle of data collection. This circle included conceptualization of site selection, purposeful sampling, individual (participant) selection, gaining access and making rapport, collecting data and recording, field issues, and data storage. Each of these organizers is outlined and its interplay with the study is discussed below.

Site Selection

A significant element of this study hinged on the proper selection of school districts. Rather than the representative sampling prevalent in traditional positivist study, this work utilized the purposeful sampling of an "active" subset of all Iowa districts. Purposeful sampling, as suggested by Schumacher and McMillan (1993), is often chosen when an unusual dimension of an event (such as the implementation of a new federal policy mandate) identified information-rich entities that exhibited varying degrees of compliance. The use of purposeful sampling also increased the utility of information received from small samples. Purposeful sampling identified Iowa districts that were "active" in the implementation of previous accountability mandates. For the purposes of this study, active schools were defined as those districts that chose to adapt, adopt, coordinate, or expand on government initiatives (Firestone, 1989). These schools were believed to embody the characteristics needed for this study by providing strategies and cultures that favor successful implementation.

Sites for the study were developed using "networking techniques" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). State Department of Education officials, Area Education Association (AEA) personnel, members of statewide associations, and administrators were asked to nominate school districts to participate in the study. This type of reputational-case sampling seeks the recommendations of knowledgeable experts for the best samples available.

Three members of the State Department of Education officials were chosen based on recommendations of administrators knowledgeable about the structure of the Department of Education and the responsibilities of various employees. Each was contacted by phone, electronically, and finally in person. They received Firestone's (1989) definition of active school districts and were informed of the intent of the work and how the information would

be used. These identified a total of 12 school districts. Along with the recommendations came the following publication request:

> The Iowa Department of Education does not rank order school districts, nor does it publicly hold one school above another. As a result, in your study, nowhere should The Iowa Department of Education be listed as "Department recommended" or "Department endorsed."

Area education association personnel were then contacted to produce a list of suggestions. Seven knowledgeable AEA employees were asked to supply the names of active school districts. A total of 13 schools were recommended. Administrators from Iowa schools and members of educational associations were also contacted. Eight district administrators were asked to recommend active schools. A total of 11 schools were identified by administrators and associations. In each case, the process mirrored the approach used with the Department of Education nominations.

The resulting recommendations were triangulated to identify school districts that appeared on multiple lists and were generally acknowledged as active. The final list was gleaned to three school districts. One in Western Iowa, one in Central Iowa, and one in Eastern Iowa. As the study progressed, administrators at each chosen site were asked to identify other active districts. This snowballing of recommendations (Creswell, 1998, p.119) provided further validation as chosen districts identified each other by reputation. After the districts were chosen, their middle schools became the focus of this study due to the familiarity and expertise of the researcher as well as the importance of including the middle school setting in the over-all research design of the FINE foundation study.

Participant Selection.

Once sites selection was finalized, on-line and print documents were examined from each district. Following the review, knowledgeable local implementers were chosen to participate in a first-person examination to better understand the inner workings of these active schools. As suggested by Fuhrman (1999), local practitioners were chosen who had experience and a depth of understanding regarding how policy implementation was actually working in each district. This study identified superintendents and middle school principals as the initial contacts for each school district.

This initial contact was used to gather information and gain access to other school district personnel. These superintendents and principals acted as "gatekeepers." In ethnographic studies, this gatekeeper is typically the initial contact for the researcher and leads to other informants (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1995). In this study, administrative gatekeepers lent legitimacy to the researchers by positively discussing the study with their employees. They also enabled the process by building interview schedules and providing materials or document reviews.

The purposeful selection of participants represents a key decision point in any qualitative research (Creswell, 1998). The initial face-to-face contacts were made with the superintendents of each of the three "active" school districts. The first district visit with the superintendent was to explain the purpose of the study and gain permission to interview a minimum of 10 participants. A total of 10 participants were chosen believing that "a few cases, interviewed in depth, would yield many insights about the topic" (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993, p. 378).

The participants included the superintendent, building-level administrators, curriculum director, a school board member and six classroom teachers. The superintendent was asked to pick the school board member and building level principals were asked to suggest teachers for the study. Principals were to select individuals who are knowledgeable and informed about the implementation of policy (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993). In general, participants were selected based on their presence in the district during the implementation process, the richness of their experiences, and their thoughtful nature in areas relevant to this research project.

The Interview Process

As the interviews unfolded, all participants received information explaining the purpose of the study and the manner in which results would be used. At the time of the interview, each participant read and signed a Consent Form (see A). This form stated the uses and purpose of the study, the voluntary nature, and the ability of the interviewee to withdraw at any stage of the study.

Participants were reminded that the primary audience would be state policymakers, teachers and administrators, board members, and those involved in education at the state and AEA level. Moreover, since the study was carried out under the auspices of the legislatively created FINE foundation, the results may be released more publicly, so the eventual audience was unknown. With this understanding, the interviews were carried out using the interview forms found in Appendix B. At the end of each interview session, participants were thanked, reminded that they would receive a copy of the report summary, and told that a member check would be conducted. This member check would allow participants to review

transcripts for accuracy. After reading the transcript, their input and clarifications were welcome. Some scholars of qualitative research consider this step to be crucial for he credibility of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

At each step of the research, ethical guidelines were followed to protect the privacy and the confidentiality of participants. In research, the investigator's paramount responsibility is to those they study. When there is conflict of interest, the individuals must come first. Researchers must do everything in their power to protect the physical, social, and psychological welfare and to honor the dignity and privacy of those studied (American Anthropologcal Association, 1983, p. 1). This research was approved by the human subjects review board of Drake University.

Collecting and Recording Data

During the study, specific attention was given to enhancing the trustworthiness of the data. The conventional criteria for trustworthiness are internal validity, external validity, objectivity, and reliability. A parallel system exists for naturalistic study. Internal validity is replaced by "credibility:" "Transferability" replaces external validity. "Dependability" corresponds to reliability. Objectivity is replaced by "confirmability" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To increase the credibility of a naturalistic study, Lincoln and Guba suggest the use of prolonged engagement, triangulation, and member checking. Prolonged engagement in this study is represented by three visits to each school district (representing a total of four days at each site). The triangulation of document reviews, interviews, and field notes further enhance

credibility. Finally, member checking of the final documents by participants assures a greater sensitivity to the true meaning of each interview.

Data for this study was collected from two main sources, document reviews and interviews. Denzin (1994) states that using two data sources allows researchers to seek out patterns of consistency within the respective sources and between the two sources. During the document review, the examination included the Consolidated School Improvement Plan (CSIP), staff development histories, Annual Progress Reports (APR), demographic data, financial records, and other related materials. These documents provided insight into the local organizational schemes, governance, and culture.

The interview phase of the study provided perceptions from those engaged in the work of implementing the accountability mandates. The credibility of this research rested primarily on these site interviews. Good interviews relied on the development of good questions and interviewing skills. The interview questions and techniques were honed during pilot interview sessions. The interview questions were developed and tested in pilot interviews with a member of the Iowa Department of Education, a superintendent, a curriculum director, a principal, and two teachers. Locke (1993) suggested, after completing a pilot, researchers can step back, reflect on their experiences, discuss it with their peers, and revise their research based on what they learned from the pilot study. The final selection of questions was determined after the pilot study. Meetings were held with the doctoral committee and my peers to assure quality of the questions and processes. The final results of these meetings are reflected in the question sets in Appendixes C and D.

As the process unfolded at each site, participants were involved in a 60-minute in-depth interview. The research method employed active listening, reflection, and occasional

prompts when such seemed appropriate. The interviews were tape recorded and field notes were kept by the interviewer. Vygotsky (1987) advised that accuracy is increased with taped interviews since each word a participant speaks reflects his or her consciousness. Field notes provided the researcher's impressions and general observations regarding the setting and nature of the interviews. The interviewer wrote reflections directly after each session. These reflections summarized major points and general perceptions.

The final contact with each district was to conduct a member check. A written report was mailed to the site respondents for their perusal prior to the third visits. Interviewees were given the opportunity to examine these draft copies of data and invited to discuss the accuracy and credibility of the interpretations. Any comments or clarifications could be directed back to the interviewer for inclusion in the study.

This study did not intend to evaluate the current Iowa school improvement policy or generalize to a larger statewide population (Cresswell, 1994). However, it is still the qualitative researcher's responsibility to maximize what can be learned in the study (Tellis, 1997). This thick description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the participants, their interviews, the environment, and conditions add to the understanding of the reader and allow the selective linkage from this environment to others.

Field Issues and Data Management

Field issues such as collection of notes, timelines for interviews, issues of obtaining permission, interviewing techniques, ethical issues, and many others were discussed with peers and the doctoral committee. Their experience and input was extremely valuable to develop protocols, reasonable expectations, and to anticipate problems in the field. In

addition, discussions on data management and developing a sense of the enormity of data to expect.

During these meetings, various filing systems, including computer software programs, were analyzed and discussed at length. However, computerized systems were not chosen due to perceived difficulty of use and my inexperience with the software. In addition, the need for quality interviewing equipment and backup systems was emphasized. The final process of data collection included written notes, two tape recorders running simultaneously, and the naming of reliable transcriptionists.

Data Analysis

One by one, each set of school data was analyzed in its entirety. Constant comparison was employed to search for patterns and themes emerging from the employees of each individual school district. Throughout the study ongoing document reviews along with open coding of transcripts was employed to retain sensitivity to the participant's views (Peshkin, 1993). After transcription, each transcript passage was marked and recorded. A computer was used to compile each passage into a graphic display that was shared with the doctoral committee and peers. The process of noting what is interesting, labeling it, and putting it into appropriate files is called "coding"data (Dey, 1993, p. 58). In open coding, the researcher forms "initial categories of information" (Creswell 1998, p. 57). Strauss and Corbin (1998) further explain that categories are aggregated units of information (categories) composed of events, happenings, and instances. As suggested by Creswell (1998, p. 57), subcategories were found within each major category by "dimensionalizing the data to show the extreme possibilities on the continuum of the properties." Following open coding, "axial coding"

(Creswell, 1998, p. 57) was used to reconstruct the data in new ways. Winnowing the data into a reduced form identifies core categories. Codes were compared and rearranged until saturated. The data was then compared between schools. To aid in the organization of data, tables were developed for participants. These tables aided the organization and display of the data. Table 1 represents a model table used for an administrator from school A. Similar tables were constructed for all participants.

Table 1

School District A Administrator

Inquiry Categories	Sample Perceptions
Knowledge of HF 2272	Became aware through meetings at AEA
Assess available skills and resources	Not enough time was provided for implementation
District implementation strategies	Directed initiatives for increased teaming
Understanding legislative intent	Was involved in early discussions at legislative level
Improving policy design	Visit schools and provide incentives

Perceptions of school personnel within each school were examined using a table similar to the model that appears in Table 2. (T1 is the first teacher interviewed, T2 is the second teacher interviewed, etc.). Each school was similarly handled and trend data within the schools was developed. General themes for each individual school were identified.

Table 2

School A

Categories	Administrators	Board Member	1- 6 Teachers	Trends
Knowledge of HF 2272	Through Superintendent	Curriculum director	Curriculum director	From Central Office
Assess skills and resources	Insufficient time	Insufficient time	Insufficient time	Insufficient time
District Implementation Strategies	Use capacity developed from other initiatives	Blend with previous initiatives	Increase teaming and focus	Use capacity to respond to change
Understanding legislative intent	Raise standardized test scores	Raise standardized test scores	Raise standardized test scores	Raise standardized test scores
Improving policy design	More stability, time	More visits, time, money	Visits, time, money, and stability	More visits, time, money, and stability

Finally, trends between schools were identified. A table similar to the model that appears in Table 3 was developed to compare the trends of each school to each other. The researcher looked across school districts to find trends common to all school districts

Table 3

Trends Across Three Schools

Categories	School A	School B	School C	Trends
Knowledge of HF 2272	From superintendent	From curriculum director	Curriculum director	From central office
Assess skills and resources	Insufficient time	Insufficient time	Insufficient time	Insufficient time
District Implementation Strategies	Direct pre-existing capacity at compliance	Direct pre-existing capacity at compliance	Direct pre-existing capacity at compliance	Direct pre-existing capacity at compliance
Understanding legislative intent	Raise test scores	Raise test scores	Raise test scores	Raise test scores
Improving policy design	More visits, time, money, and stability	More visits, time, money, and stability	More visits, time, money, and stability	More visits, time, money, and stability

Limitations

The issue of trust in research begins with the recognition of those limitations that exist in the design and nature of the study (Merriam, 1998). Potential limitations to this study would include a lack of generalizability to other situations. This study is not a representation of a statistical sampling of schools and its results are intended only to represent three active schools at a moment in time. Nor does this study attempt to use the results to extrapolate predictions to other schools. This data is qualitative in nature and is constructed from the perceptions of those interviewed.

At the outset it is incumbent to identify my own personal bias are present in the original design decisions. An example would include, my interest in middle level education. This prompted my choice of middle school teachers as interview participants. I cannot escape my personal frame of reference as data is viewed through the lens of my own experiences and judgment. That judgment depends on the researcher's experience, both in the past in general and in working with and internalizing the interviewing material; it may be the most important ingredient a researcher brings to the study (Marshall, 1981). However, at every junction I attempted to avoid any bias that would be introduced by my background. I made an effort to remain neutral during the questioning process, note taking, transcription, coding of tapes, and development of findings. Teachers were nominated by administrators and school members were nominated by the superintendent.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness persuades a reader that a study is credible and worthy of attention. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 301) set strict criteria for the development of trustworthiness in a naturalistic study. Included in this list were activities that increase the probability that credible findings will be produced: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, referential adequacy, and member checks. These methods were used throughout the data collection, analysis, and reporting stages to establish trustworthiness.

Multiple visits to each site for the purposes of gaining hour-long, in-depth interviews with a minimum of nine sources at each site provided sufficient engagement to ascertain the culture of each school. In addition to interviews with multiple informants, triangulation at

each site included document reviews, notes, tours, and a reflexive journal. Informal member checks after transcribing interviews provided an important opportunity to verify the opportunity to assess intentionality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). That is, the actual intent of the informant is assured by reviewing, or "playing back," a written transcript. Referential adequacy is enhanced by the archiving of transcribed interviews, site summaries, coded transcripts, audio tapes, and reflections as an audit trail. Using the participants' own words in the development, coding, and reporting enhances the trustworthiness of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 313). Finally, due to good fortune, the study was a piece of a larger research commissioned by the FINE organization. Peer debriefing on a regular basis exposed the researcher to the groups' searching questions, the opportunity to "bounce hypothesis off" more objective colleagues, introduction of alternate methodological designs, and provided a support group throughout the often isolated work of naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308).

Chapter 4

After all, politics is about allocating

values through government.

Educational concerns are not the exception.

Kirst, 1997

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

This chapter represented the findings of each research question posed in Chapter 1. In each of the three districts, the first visitation occurred with the superintendent and included an extensive gathering of documents for review. The second visit included a minimum of nine interviews that were conducted over a two-day period. The third and final visit was to conduct a review of transcripts by the participants. The findings are organized under six topics, which include local characteristics and culture, local perceptions of the policy intent, impact on schools, barriers to implementation of the mandates, unanticipated consequences of the mandates, unanticipated consequences of the mandates, and suggestions to improve such mandates during future legislation.

School A

Local Characteristics

District characteristics.

District A covered over 200 square miles in rural Iowa and served approximately 2,000 students in kindergarten through 12th grade. The district had over one 125 teachers housed in five school buildings. Extracurricular facilities included gymnasiums, a baseball diamond, and an athletic stadium. The activities program had grown steadily each year.

The school clientele was characterized by a free and reduced lunch population slightly under the state average. The district ethnic diversity was significantly under the state average, as was the number of limited English proficient students.

Financially, the last five years revealed a significant carryover of approximately $250,000 in cash. During the last five years, the average unspent balance had grown steadily. The financial picture revealed the solid monetary health of the district. The average teacher salary was just under the state average and the teacher experience was in excess of the state average. Like most rural Iowa school districts, the district had an extensive bus route system and a large transportation fleet. State technology funds were used to lay fiber optics cable. All classrooms had computers with high speed (TI) connection to the Internet. All staff had e-mail connections. Each media center had a mini computer lab. There were several large computer labs located throughout the district, and the district had its own Website. Breakfast and lunch were served at all sites.

District-wide student achievement was measured by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) at the elementary level and the Iowa Test of Educational Development at the high school level. Accountability was reported to the state at grades 4, 8, and 11 in reading and

math. Reporting in science was in grades 8 and 11. The district used these tests to measure student achievement growth. The district's goal was to decrease to zero the number of students falling below the 40th percentile on standardized tests. An overall view of the district's achievement revealed math scores above the 70th percentile in all grade levels. Reading scores were at or above the 60th percentile, while science was above the 70th percentile at all levels. After graduation, over 85% of District A graduates pursued post-secondary education or training. Ninety percent of District A students achieved a successful score on a status report indicating probable success in post-secondary education. The dropout rate was far less than the state average.

The district had a strong heritage of staff development for its teachers. The local AEA and surrounding schools look to the district for leadership in this area. In fact, a school board member identified its status as a "lighthouse district" for surrounding schools. That is, this district was acknowledged as a leader in implementing new staff development initiatives. Cooperative learning, middle school concept, thematic education, and multiple intelligences training were included in a partial list of staff development efforts within the past five years. The district utilized study teams to implement initiatives. Teaming was a significant ingredient of school success mentioned by all educators.

Local culture.

Many educators felt the culture of this school and community was unique. One educator offers, "We had our ducks together in a lot of respects. We're doing a good job. We had a lot of community support. We just don't do a lot of show and tells." A teacher with many years of continuous service added, "For years we had no money and things were not good. Then, the economy got better and everything turned around, including our reputation.

Now, we considered ourselves a progressive district and surrounding smaller districts respect our leadership." A school board member emphasized this point:

> We moved to this district because my job would draw from this community and many of the smaller surrounding communities. The school benefited from the same phenomenon. It was a lighthouse district for the surrounding schools. We benefited from geography. There wasn't another big town within a fifty-minute drive. We were the leader and our reputation grew from that.

Educators believed many of the parents were typical blue collar working people. They supported their schools and passed bond issues. They had simple questions about schools. When asked what types of information parents valued about their school, one administrator replied:

> I think they wanted to know something about how the standardized tests were going, but they really wanted to know their teacher's name and that their kids were safe at school, having a good time and that type of thing. Reporting was both formal and informal and always seemed to satisfy our community. Since the government made us change our reporting, I guess the government knew something about our school that the community didn't know.

Local Perceptions of Policy Intent

The cost of declining status.

Educators noted that Iowa traditionally ranked at or near the top of standardized testing scores. The perception of a quality education had been one of Iowa's few selling points. Educators believed that Iowans believed that this education heritage was in danger

from sliding test scores. As one educator said, "Education had always been Iowa's strong suit, it's an ego thing about being the best in the nation at something." Participants believed that Iowa had few lures to attract and hold its business and citizens. Concerns were high regarding the loss of young adults to other states. Teachers were especially distressed at seeing some of their most talented and brightest students move out of state. Therefore, any downturn in education trends would harm an already precarious economy and state ego. As one board member commented, "We don't have wages or a favorable climate, so a good education is one of the few recruitment tools. After all, that was the reason we moved back to Iowa." Educators felt that achievement slips must be addressed for the sake of all Iowans.

Reaction to federal pressure.

There was a strong consensus that Iowa had no choice but to implement systemic changes in education. Iowa was the lone holdout to a nationwide system of content standards and standardized assessment. Iowa educators believed that pressure for compliance with federal mandates was increasingly intense. A principal summed up the sentiment with his comment, "We were getting hammered pretty good because we were the only state without state standards." In fact, one teacher believed Iowa was on the verge of "losing local control to the federal government, losing control of schools completely." This threat caused great consternation to educators in a local control state. To keep its last vestiges of local control, educators believed Iowa struck a deal with the federal government. The curriculum director proposed, "This deal allowed the schools to keep some of their local control in exchange for reporting of core achievement indicators to the department of education and the federal government." Participants bemoaned the loss of some control but understood the federal pressure that Iowa legislators were facing.

Increased accountability in exchange for increased spending.

Initially, many participants believed that legislators sincerely wanted to increase student achievement by improving teaching. Educators speculated that legislators equated declining test scores with teachers not doing their jobs. One administrator commented:

> You can say what you want, but this whole deal is about increasing accountability. It's making districts more accountable for what they're doing. Districts were holding teachers more accountable and kids were going to get more of what is being measured. Like it or not. Somebody is going to look at these plans and our results. That's the bottom line.

Educators often associated increased data collection and increased accountability to hints of increased salary. A principal summarized this when she said:

> I'm a realist. If you look at the state budget and the amount of money the state was spending on education, we have something to prove to them. I personally heard several legislators say that if we going to pay teachers more, then we want to know they are doing the job.

This increased accountability among educators was universally seen as increasing standardized test scores. As one administrator shared, "Increased pay also means increased test scores. It's a chicken or the egg kind of thing as to which comes first."

The politics of educational reform.

Many educators developed a suspicion that the policy implementation was favorable to larger school districts. The timelines and accountability requirements would eventually drain energy and resources from smaller districts. Several participants believed that complex

reporting mechanisms would purposely force consolidation of smaller school districts. As one administrator shared, "You need someone in your district whose full-time job is to focus on curriculum and instruction. When the superintendent also runs transportation, nutrition, and other stuff, who is doing the mandated stuff?" However, the superintendent added, "It is easier to move 18 teachers than one 130. So size may demonstrate some tradeoffs." A size-issue dichotomy was proposed by a teacher who noted limits to size discrepancies:

> Economically, larger schools have more money and technology. They tend to score better on tests and have better placement in colleges. How are we going to compare the big 4A schools to schools with less than 200 in the whole district? They just don't have the resources to compete.

Impact on the Schools

Dissemination of the policy information.

A comparison of participant transcripts identified no single method by which the mandates were communicated to educators or the community. Leadership felt that tight timelines disrupted the usual lines of communications. Timelines focused communication efforts on teacher-leaders, union representatives, and select community members. As a result, only a small number of staff and community became aware of the legislation through traditional district channels of communication. Other teachers with close ties to the local area education association were knowledgeable early on. The vast remainder of the faculty initially became aware of the mandates through personal readings, e-mailings from legislators, union meetings, newspapers, and informal teacher conversations. This lack of continuity of delivery surprised many educators. Previously, messages flowed back and

forth smoothly through district study teams, but not this time. Leadership admitted that this discontinuity accounted for some confusion originally and some which still exists. An experienced teacher advises, "We needed to get people aware of what was happening right away. The more you can make people aware earlier on, the better the outcome will be." A teacher offered that the lack of good communication resulted in, "what we call a third generation memo. At each level the message is interpreted a little differently, so different employees end up doing different things with different understandings." One administrator blamed the confusion on the legislature, "I'm still not sure we're doing what the legislature wanted. I'm not sure that they [the legislature] knew what they wanted. I just can't tell."

A new focus on excellence.

Many educators noted the streamlining effects of the legislation. Teachers believed that previous initiatives were worthwhile, but jumped from cooperative learning one year, to Stiggins the next, and to peer coaching the next. The district moved from one bandwagon to another and teachers felt there was precious little time to implement. Teachers now had a single focus of accountability for student achievement and held hopes for proper implementation time. An educator noted, "We've always done such a hodgepodge of things. For a long time we have been looking for follow-through. If this doesn't focus you, then it's as worthless as the curriculum guides have been the last thirty years." An administrator went further:

> It really makes you decide what's important in your district and what isn't. It has given us extreme focus on reading, reading comprehension, and math. As a result, it has also focused funding, staff development, and energy on those topics. You don't have time for staff development like laughter in the classroom anymore.

Many educators have rejoiced in a deeper shared commitment to excellence. As one administrator stated, "I think we are more accountable for what we do and how we teach than before 2272."Another prominent educator echoed the sentiment:

> We were like many other schools. We were touchy-feely. We were doing a good job in a nice community. The schools were nice and people were happy. Then we discovered that we were doing a good job, but not a great job. Now we look at test data. Our eye is on the ball. We redid our standards and benchmarks, changed the curriculum cycle, and we are a different school.

Teachers expressed hope that this new initiative would provide adequate implementation time and not degenerate into the hodgepodge bandwagons of the past.

Change in educator's roles after policy implementation.

The roles of all involved in the educational process were changed by the legislation. The superintendent stated:

> My job was to focus people on the plan. When I first received a copy of Chapter 12, I went through it with a fine tooth comb. I have been reading this stuff ever since. It consumed my job. There isn't any doubt that 2272 caused more work for school administrators.

Other educators commented on the changing role of the superintendent. An administrator noted, "I never knew how important a key leadership person at the top really was. You have to know where you want to go, but you also have to identify the vehicles which will take you there." This statement indicated the increasing need to identify, hire, and retain leaders.

Principals are now deeply engaged in the process of data collection. The principal summarized:

> In the last three years, I've paid a lot closer attention to data. It clicked with me that parents pay for education and deserve to know achievement data just like they would deserve to have a house inspected before they buy it. They need to know the good and the bad. I had an obligation to know that data and share it with the public.

Another administrator commented on changes to her professional life:

> The mandates caused a ton of change. I get to crunch numbers more, but I didn't have as much time to manage the building. Many of my tasks have been delegated to teachers and secretaries. Now, if I was working with numbers and a student was sent to the office, they waited longer to see me. Leadership is more important than management at that moment.

Most teachers believe the mandates have fundamentally changed the profession. As one science teacher noted, "There is a much stronger focus. We are much more accountable than ever before. Now we have to prove we are doing a good job, we can't just say it." This accountability has come from the strict alignment of curriculum and development of new skills. A language arts teacher feels, "I take this new accountability as a personal challenge to improve myself and to make things better for kids. This focus on reading is long overdue." Changing teachers to teacher-leaders has been especially critical to the process. An administrator remarked, "It is critical to identify teacher leaders and give them power. More of the leadership work had to be done by teachers. I did not have the time to do everything." A teacher noted a significant role change in his career due to the mandates. He remembered:

> When I got out of college, I saw my job as a creator of activities. Be creative, make good activities and they will learn. Now I feel my role has changed to an assessor of growth. That's a change for me. I don't know how I feel about that.

Without doubt, the mandates provided a renaissance for the significance of curriculum directors. The curriculum director was charged with writing the district's comprehensive school improvement plan. This plan was the result of a collaborated effort; however, the superintendent noted "We couldn't have done this without an excellent curriculum director. He really helped guide the entire process. I can't believe districts could survive without this position." The curriculum director admitted spending "countless hours" insuring compliance for the district and assisting in the design and implementation of the district plan. He believed:

> It forces you to make the best use of your time. I have to prioritize. When I first moved to this job, I went to conferences once or twice a year to find out what was going on in other places. Now, I have no time for that. Compliance locally had taken the place of a lot of the innovative sharing I used to do with other districts.

The role of community in the process changed, but not necessarily as might be anticipated. If a central purpose of the legislation was to improve community involvement, educators saw the inverse result. One veteran educator noted:

> I think we really lost input from our staff and community when we brought pre-established plans with tighter limitations due to the legislation. We used to build these plans together from scratch. Now, we forced involvement but I wouldn't call it collaboration.You can't mandate collaboration.

The superintendent echoed a similar sentiment when she noted:

> Parent input was always valuable prior to 2272. They assisted and served the role of devil's advocate. Now, how can we expect community members to understand this change when our teachers don't even have the expertise yet? Things are so complex

> now that professionals have spent hundreds of hours developing this process. The parents are intimidated by the complexity. I don't blame them. They just ended up saying just tell us what to do and we'll do it.

In many ways, educators believed that parents moved from active players in the game to active spectators of the game.

Localizing the mandates.

The educators interviewed believed the district has historically been held accountable. Perhaps not by the state for standardized test results, but held accountable by their local community. The community had always believed the district was progressive with good leadership. One teacher offered:

> Our district had always been focused on accountability, just not to the government. More to our community. We've had to think outside the box to get ahead. We had a private school within the county and recruiting is always a challenge. We have always lived in a competitive environment.

In addition, the inner-workings of the district school board meetings were covered continually by the local newspaper. An educator commented, "Our business is always open to the public, when it comes to the newspaper, sometimes we're the only game in town. There really aren't any secrets here." Further evidence of the unique situation and the culture is indicated by the curriculum director:

> It is impossible to rebuild what we have done here in a different setting. We were not a copy cat district. I'm not sure we were doing what the legislature wanted. I'm not sure that they knew what they wanted. They can come and tell us we were doing it

> wrong, but we're doing it in a common sense way for us. We're trying to have it make sense for our kids, in our town.

One teacher had just arrived from a different school district. This circumstance resulted in a different perception. This teacher saw the mandates as an equity issue. All Iowa students would be learning the same content. She saw a standardizing impact as curriculums and techniques statewide were becoming more similar. She observed that the two Iowa schools were establishing similar standards, assessments, and staff development. This standardizing process would result in a loss of autonomy by individual classroom teachers. There would be less choice of topics for teachers and fewer options to deliver the content. As a result, she determined:

> The law implies that, if these were truly public schools, then children should learn the same things. When students moved, they should not be at a disadvantage. Some of the experienced teachers talked as they struggled with losing the ability to make decisions. I never experienced that freedom, so I don't miss it. But I could tell that they missed it.

Changes in staff development.

Upon hearing of the mandates, the curriculum director and superintendent sat down to plan. They chose first to address standards and benchmarks. They employed a consortium to develop assessments for those standards. Teachers worked in teams with members of the same department at other grade levels. This between grade level work was somewhat new. Most teams were built within grade levels at the middle school. However, teams quickly adjusted. This process encompassed first year staff development.

The second year was spent goal setting for grades 4, 8, and 11. Evaluations were chosen for these grades that aligned with the newly established standards. In addition, "All children can learn to read" was circulated in a bumper sticker style campaign to focus staff on the new reading goals. Reading training was provided for all teachers and a united effort to raise test scores swept across the district.

Year three was greeted with a new motto, "all teachers are reading teachers." Study teams were recreated. The district was familiar with a teaming process from previous staff development efforts. Little additional training was required. Instead, faculty energy was focused on learning grade specific reading strategies and the logging of progress. Principals read teacher-initiated logs and responded to their progress toward the goals. Teachers demonstrated accountability for implementing the changes and looked forward to reaping the benefits of these changes. One teacher observed, "There is a lot of trust in trying this new stuff. There are things I don't have time to cover as a result. We better see results."

Barriers to Implementation

Time.

A lack of time was universally identified as a barrier to implementation. As a curriculum director evaluated the changes, he commented, "We were hurting for time. We're trying to get extra time passed by our school board. That is always a challenge." Because the new legislation did not provide additional reimbursed time, the increase in workload impacted the personal and professional lives of teachers. One teacher recounted a typical day. She explained:

> I teach a senior class. We have large classes here. The work now is overwhelming. Last night I spent two hours writing standards and another half hour writing reading logs. I worked on my lesson plans and went to bed late. I didn't have time to check student work or make up a packet for tomorrow. It's just more time I have to spend on weekends or during free periods and less time I can spend with students. Legislators need to know how this taxes the entire system.

Another teacher commented, "Money wasn't always the biggest issue. This type of change takes time. Something this big cannot happen overnight." Teachers felt pressure from society to address all the issues in a child's life, in addition to education. Historically, the staff felt that adequate time was originally given for instruction, but not now when they must subtract the time lost to addressing today's social issues. A potential suggestion came from a classroom teacher, "If you can't give us more time, then take some social things off the plate. We can't solve all of society's ills in eight hours."

Reinforced teacher resistance.

Most teachers initially rallied to the new mandates and optimistically embraced the opportunity to improve achievement in exchange for additional funding for schools. However, some returned to their previous skepticism as additional resources were not provided. As one teacher-leader noted, "One of the biggest problems now is just getting disillusioned people on board. I don't know how administrators do it on a regular basis." Another educator reflected, "Many of these teachers can't pinpoint exactly why they are unhappy, but this legislation seemed to focus and reinforce all the frustrations of the past." A young teacher echoed that sentiment. "The changes aren't as big for me as they are for more experienced teachers. I hear them say that everyone is always trying to change education, but

nothing ever happens." Some teachers recognized a wedge being driven between teachers actively engaged in the process and those who resisted the changes. One experienced teacher-leader bemoaned:

> The biggest impact will occur when everyone cooperates across the board. We need to change if it's in the best interest of the kids. I don't understand negative philosophies. I don't tolerate them very well, either. They needed to either get on or off the boat.

Teachers were very concerned that they would be held accountable for situations beyond their control. Teachers wanted legislators to realize the frustrating lack of support from some parents. Families negatively impacted student academic growth by exerting choices that hinder achievement. That is, many parents do not believe in homework and won't send their students to summer school. One teacher lamented that she has a young girl in class who qualifies for special education, but the parent refuses services. She lamented:

> I can only help her so far. She needed more specialized help. I could only argue so long unless we go to a hearing. If those parents don't change, she's probably not going to perform better regardless of the changes in the law. She probably won't show a year's growth on the mandated tests. Will I be judged on that?

As a result, educators ask that legislators broaden accountability into a shared responsibility with parents and community. All involved should have standards of accountability and cooperation.

A lack of resources hinders the process.

Most of the educators gave credit to the legislature for "originally having their hearts in the right place concerning educational issues" but strongly resented the lack of follow-up

support from the legislature. One veteran administrator commented, "Tell the legislature not to come up with this stuff and then not support us. Don't just give us the eight teaching standards and leave us sitting there." Even this relatively lucrative district felt a lack of resources to purchase teacher time and hire the substitute teachers that would allow classroom visitations, observations, and intensive work necessary for implementation. An influx of new money would be necessary to accomplish the task.

Educators also saw a problem in their ability to find new resources to tackle the real-life problems that hinder achievement of the district goals. A principal suggested:

> We have so many special education programs to support learning disabled kids. The question really is how do you eliminate at-risk kids in your district? There are so many kids who do not have disabilities but are devoid of the traditional American family support systems that made education successful. How big is the funding stream for those kids? I'll tell you, it's just a trickle.

In addition, the mandates hamstring administrator's ability to allocate the funding they already have. So many strings are tied to funding streams that flexibility is almost impossible. The superintendent summed up with this concern:

> Representatives say that we need dynamic leadership. They want dynamic leadership in the department of education and the schools. How can I by dynamic when I can't control the money that comes into my school? The federal and state mandates target the money. How much room does that leave me to be dynamic?

Unintended Consequences

An exaggerated focus on high stakes testing.

A universal feeling among educators was the danger of overemphasizing the importance of standardized testing. The superintendent speculated that legislators wanted "quantifiable bottom lines. They want to quantify student achievement with a single measure, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. It was quick and easy to understand." A teacher identified the danger in focusing on a single measure.

> I read all the scores in the *Des Moines Register*. People compare. I just wish education was that easy. There are so many more things involved in education than just test scores. Kids are people, not like a machine where we can give them information and they spit it back out. Since they are not machines; sometimes other things are more important in their lives than test scores.

Educators expressed additional concerns that more than schools were being compared. Teachers found that student self-esteem was being negatively impacted. Students will know that meeting the standards was important for the school. They will know that every student score matters. One teacher worried:

> Just as entire schools were identified as failing, individual students would also be identified as failing to meet standards. The kids knew the district goals and they knew their personal scores weren't cutting it. How do you think those failing students will feel?

The principal feared that eventually his entire career would be judged by standardized testing results:

> In the past, I never worried about losing my job over test scores. I was more likely to lose my job if student discipline went to hell or if the building was out of control. Now, I think you will start to see administrative dismissals as a result of test scores. Is that all the principal's fault? No, but the leader will take the hit.

Narrowing of the curriculum.

Teachers felt that the mandates focused then so much that other school topics do not seem as important. A severe narrowing of the curriculum was reported. A superintendent offered, "They only asked you to measure math, science, and reading. Social studies, physical education, and other areas have trouble seeing where they fit in. We were a pioneer in this state in K-12 curriculums in some of these areas. We have basically put those on hold so we could deal with reading, math and science, in that order." Another administrator added:

> There were tough considerations I needed to make when staff asked me to add a music teacher. I told them that I'm not being held accountable for how the kids sang or played instruments. When the state comes and asks me how the band's playing, I'll have a different attitude toward music than I do right now. I'm not saying that we don't have some balance in the curriculum, but such an imbalance in accountability is a negative thing.

In addition, many valued initiatives have suffered at the middle school, especially middle level concept. A veteran teacher noted:

> We did a lot fewer cross-curricular kinds of things than we used to. When you had to spend so much time to insure the standards and benchmarks were getting done, it left less time for everything else. I think many of the relevant and fun things weren't

going on. It's not that kids and teachers weren't having any fun anymore, just not to the same degree.

Teachers have noticed a shift in emphasis from pedagogy to content. A teacher reflected, "Staff development had moved from cooperative learning and multiple intelligences strategies to developing standards and benchmarks and mapping those standards." Although cooperative learning had been a district staple for years as a pedagogy, a teacher asserted, "I am not sure that we even try to expose new teachers to cooperative learning anymore, there is not time."

Driving educators from the profession.

Teachers discussed the potential loss of teachers as a result of the mandates. One educator wondered, "The paperwork had a tremendous impact. Was the paperwork telling me I am a good teacher or telling me that I am good at filling out paperwork?" Teachers did not begrudge the state some type of role in assuring accountability. However, they sense the loss of decision-making power. One teacher reflected:

> It's difficult to determine the right fuel mixture. What is enough guidance from the state without being too cumbersome and becoming an administrative nightmare which steals all the fun from teaching? When were the requirements going to ruin our ability to teach?

One young teacher worried:

> When requirements got too heavy, instead of recruiting new teachers, they made people hit the high road. Four of the people I graduated with said; enough was enough. They now work at Pioneer as lab technicians. They had the same degree I have and they make a lot more money. They worked from nine to five instead of

seven to six like I do. Unless I have coaching, then it's later. It doesn't take long to figure out that something is wrong with this profession.

Administrators echoed many of the same concerns. One experienced building level principal said, "People will see the additional money in administration. But, they don't always see the work, since it includes supervision at sports events, night meetings and weekend work. There's already an administrator shortage and this will make it worse." Administrators saw positive aspects of the mandates, such as a focus on accountability for student achievement. However, the sentiments of all administrators were galvanized by one principal:

My personal life had taken a big hit. The hours I put in away from my family had a big impact." If I had known how much work this would be, I would have accepted one of the job offers I had from private business. Maybe it was the time for me to get out.

The district was making progress toward accepting the workload, but these outcomes were purchased at high personal and professional cost.

Just set easier goals.

Educators closely associated with setting the district goals believe different goals are necessary. They originally set the bar high. An educator involved in the original goal-setting committee shared, "We set a goal that all students would read. We couldn't make ourselves say anything else. How could we say that it would be OK if some kids didn't learn to read?" Unfortunately, the district soon found that those goals were more costly than the district could afford. Special education students and at risk students led the list of those who were not reading at grade level. A veteran educator described their philosophical struggles, "Students could not make the jump from nonreaders to readers within the time frame." As a

result, a teacher described the compromise, "We couldn't get all kids to meet the goal. The pressure was too great. So, we did what we could do, we lowered our goal and timelines were extended."

Suggestions to Improve Future Mandates

Mismatching simple solutions to complex systems.

Teachers indicated that legislators appeared to struggle with measuring success in complex organizations like schools. One administrator vocalized this struggle by saying:

> Legislators asked themselves if they were getting the best bang for the buck. They wanted to quantify teaching by test results because that was easy. To someone outside education, it seemed like a logical way to think about it. It worked in other professions. We know how many tires we have sold or how much money we have made or how much waste we had. We knew if we are better this month than we were last month. There were not many educators in the legislature and they don't understand the more complex variables of this profession.

The superintendent also commented that in her work with legislators, "They often commented that they never dreamed schools were so complicated, they just wanted simple results." One administrator suspected that "What legislators envisioned and what the Department of Education penciled out may be quite different. Many legislators told me that they never envisioned that the end product would be so complicated."

Listen to the locals.

Most educators had generally good feelings about their own legislator but were less enthusiastic about legislators as a group. In general, teachers believed that their legislator was

hardworking, but seldom left their office unless they were campaigning. When asked how legislators could improve policy-making in the future, all educators believed legislators should spend more time in the field with teachers. If education was the biggest portion of the budget, more time should be spent with educators than anywhere else. A classroom teacher suggested:

> When the legislature made changes, they should know who they are doing it to. They should monitor the results of the changes that they cause. As a constituent, I would feel better about the people making the decisions if they knew what is happening out here. They [the legislature] came up with all these wonderful ideas but they haven't thought them out. They obviously don't listen to educators, or they wouldn't force issues that they can't pay for. They want results and I don't think they care about how they get there. You're just butting heads talking to your legislator because they already have their minds set. They don't come up with a good support system, they don't listen, so I guess they don't care.

Legislators were advised to talk more to more educators, not just the convenient ones around Des Moines. Legislators should also visit more schools. An educator summed up the general feeling, "If you spent a few days in our shoes, you would know which things work and which do not. You wouldn't have to guess."

Be more flexible, trust local control.

Many of the educators identified Iowa's traditional local control as a major factor in educational success. Many teachers believed that the loss of autonomy due to the mandates would kill the goose that laid the golden egg. One teacher summed up these feelings,

> I think these mandates felt a lot like imposed standards. You imposed rules and then you kept changing the rules on me. It's almost like they didn't want us to exert our local control. They just kept switching the rules until we get tired of redoing it. We just ended up saying, just tell me what you wanted me to do and I'll do it.

In support of this sentiment, the superintendent believed that:

> Eight of the ten superintendents in my group would probably support state standards. But, I don't think you can mandate excellence by mandating standards. Excellence is a local phenomenon. It is a matter of choice, not mandate.

A coach agreed:

> You could mandate minimums but you cannot mandate that people give their maximum. In athletic teams, I asked athletes to run the mile in less than ten minutes. I couldn't ask them to run as fast as they can, because I didn't know how fast that was. I can't tell by looking. Only the athlete knows their maximum performance. Schools are the same. They could force us to meet minimums, but they could not force us to be excellent. We would only be excellent if we wanted to be.

A stable vision.

Educators believed that education was negatively impacted by the frequent power shifts in Iowa politics. This unpredictability made education vulnerable to continual change with no central focus. Educators wonder if it is even possible to set long-term goals in such an unstable environment. One superintendent contended,

> Education is a popular political topic and a way to get votes. Everybody is the education governor, everybody is the education representative, and everybody

understands school because they went there. So, when you get to political office, what do you do? You change education!

Concerns existed about the legislature's tendency to purposely use education as a political football. One administrator offered, "There's just too much politics in it. That's the most frustrating thing. The Democrats go one way and the Republicans go another. They're not looking at what is best for kids." Educators felt that legislators were tempted by politics rather than student achievement. As the superintendent lamented:

> The jury was still out on student achievement. This whole school improvement stuff is a risky experiment. It will take three to five years to see any trends. Unfortunately, any decision in the legislature is a two year decision. It's not a long-term decision. We may be going a completely different direction in five years because our representatives never stop campaigning. If the legislature is going to continue to be in charge, why not lengthen the term in office to six years? They require changes but they say you never increase taxes in an election year. That's every other year! If it's the best thing for the kids of Iowa, why wait another year? The process makes long term planning almost impossible.

Educators believed they would continue to face the practice of unfunded mandates. Legislators would campaign on a dual platform of reforming education while simultaneously promising to hold the line on taxes. They believed this duality would require change, but fail to provide resources or the desired results.

Provide resources if you were serious about improvement.

Educators chafe at the legislature's tendency to allow unfunded mandates. All educators saw a need for increasing achievement. However, they also saw the need for

additional resources and the rearrangement of funding streams. Experienced teachers were especially disappointed with a lack of funding. One longtime educator summed up the general feeling:

> A huge undertaking requires a huge investment in staff development, rewards, and time away from the classroom. I didn't see much of an investment for experienced teachers. I'm not sure they value our work or leadership. Let's see how far they can get without leaders.

An administrator also described the need for reinvigorating and rediscovering resources, "We also called on our local AEA more than ever before. They were trying to come through. But, they couldn't raise the level of all schools in our AEA. They just don't have enough consultants to do the job. We brought in a former teacher to highlight some of the new reading initiatives for us. It was expensive, but AEA couldn't do it all." A few new grants and other resources were found. However, it was not enough. The district began to tap into precious reserves. As one teacher commented, "I have been here a long time. It has taken us two decades to build up an unspent balance. At the rate these mandates are going, it will take us three years to spend it down."

School B

Local Characteristics

District characteristics.

District B was located in a large Iowa town. It is proudly self-sufficient since it is more than 50 miles from the nearest metropolitan area. The district enrollment exceeded 2,000 students in five attendance centers. The district had grown greatly in the last 10 years

despite the presence of a large, rival private system. A nearby college provided the opportunity for interaction between the school and educators of adults. College students also acted as tutors and mentors for at-risk students.

In comparison to other Iowa districts, the district had low numbers of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch. Historically, the number hovers around 11%. As a result, the district finds little need for LEP training or personnel. The community and school contained a strong ethnic heritage, but limited ethnic diversity. As a result, the percentage of minority population was well under the Iowa average. The number of students with limited English proficiency was also under the state average. The district reports a dropout rate of slightly over 1% and compares very favorably to other Iowa districts. Those students who drop out usually find jobs in the strong local economy.

The community spoke with pride about its schools in literature and Web site. City and school publications revealed ample evidence to support this sense of pride. Over 80% of their students pursued additional education after graduation. Ninety percent of high school students participated in one or more activities. The dropout rate was under the state average.

The district was admired by surrounding districts for community support for its activity programs and academic excellence. State championships in activities dominate the local landscape. Billboards, advertisements, and flyers associate business and industry with successful school activity programs. Stores proudly display booster club affiliations and "proud sponsors of the activity program" logos. Likewise, standardized test scores have traditionally enjoyed the same favored status. Scores were high and the staff was well trained in specific content areas. Teaming had a degree of popularity within the district and curriculum mapping was well underway when HF 2272 was enacted.

The strong business district fueled the district's strong financial situation. The local main street showed evidence of growth and new businesses. Local wealth was reflected in a free and reduced population less than half the state average. Unspent balance and carryover ensured a healthy financial future. Average teacher salary was more than the state average. Average tenure of teachers was well above the state average. The staff was experienced, well paid and has a tendency to remain in their jobs. The district experienced little staff turnover and enjoyed the resulting stability. Less staff turnover also meant fewer experienced teachers were diverted from teaching to mentoring.

In staff development, a strong K-12 content mapping process dominated weaker pedagogy initiatives. Much time was spent with standard development and other K-12, content related issues. Pedagogy enhancement was less evident in district reports. As a result, building- based initiatives began to move toward decentralized power and create teaching strategies specific to each attendance site. However, this attempt at site-based management met with mixed results as these building level, horizontal articulation efforts met with a strong history of vertical articulation. The new legislation provided a golden opportunity for central office. New pedagogy strategies were applied to the previously developed content standards. The plan seemed to link previous initiatives to new requirements.

Local culture impacts school culture.

The community was proud of its wealth and work ethic. This wealth was revealed by an average family income in excess of $50,000. Along with an industrial base, a strong tourism trade had developed. Due to the relative wealth of the community, almost everyone valued education. As the curriculum director noted, "People here believed the better educated you were, the more money you would have. Therefore, they promoted education among their

kids and fewer parents allow their children to fall through the cracks." An experienced teacher noted:

> This mono-culture community greatly valued education. Almost everyone shared this feeling. School had been important since the day the town was founded. So, community support is a cultural thing here. Education to some extent, is what the community is all about. It's a good tradition to have.

The culture of the community was also influenced by its industries. Several large companies dominated the landscape and set the economic and cultural climate of the community and the schools. This economic philosophy fostered a businesslike approach to their schools. Data collection and continual improvement were expectations for all businesses, including the school. A central office administrator believed, "This town was all about manufacturing. People on the street corner always talked about improvements, efficiency, and so on. It impacted the school culture." The superintendent noted with pleasure, "They always had a history of valuing data. With 2272, we have more data to value."

A second influence of the business culture was the manner in which positive advertising was employed by the school. The curriculum director reflected that "a good economy was often perception driven, bad news is not emphasized by our economic fathers. A negative focus is bad for business and tourism." A teacher of long-standing echoed this view by stating:

> The community is big on volunteering positively in booster clubs and school organizations. It portrays a friendly, positive environment for the higher echelons of management that move in and out of town. As a result, the community found little to

complain about in their schools. In fact, they found things right with their school district and featured them.

A centralized management hierarchy was evident in the large industries of the community. The school followed this tradition. In fact, as one educator commented, "Our community assures that the industrial power structure was reflected in the school. The majority of the elected board members are prominently involved in local industries." These school board members bring their business practices to the board table. The community admired these business leaders and promoted trust between the community and the school. This trust created a district reality that sought little community involvement in decision-making. A prominent educator revealed, "The school is not big on asking permission, since that will result in differing opinions which may divide the school and community." In addition, patrons were leery of changes that came from outside the district. These changes might upset the balance of school decision making. Educators firmly believed they knew what was best for their kids. This skepticism required that any change be firmly grounded in data. As a principal shared:

> This district has always been successful on standardized tests. The government is coming in and asking us to change. The community wonders, why would we risk screwing this up? That's a good question. After all the work we put into getting toward the top of the heap, why would we risk it all to squeeze out a few more points on a test? The sentiment of improvement is admirable, but where is the data base that says all this is going to work?

Local Perceptions of Policy Intent Influence the District Response

The mandates were designed to increase accountability.

Participants in District B initially believed that 2272 was designed to make educators more accountable for school success. Participants believed the source of the "pressure" for increased accountability emanated from the national level to the state of Iowa. The majority of educators see Iowa's 2272 legislation and resulting implementation efforts as an attempt to "get on the national bandwagon." The main reason for enacting such legislation was reflected by a veteran teacher, "Basically, it was to show the feds that teachers are doing their jobs. Here, we are doing our jobs so we don't have anything to worry about." Teachers believed the accountability plan created consistent curriculums from one school to the next and administered fair and consistent assessments. In a district that valued curriculum articulation and bottom line assessments, the original intent of the legislation made sense. As one teacher stated, "This equity of content and process ensures equivalent education to students in a mobile society." Some teachers also reported value in standardizing certain aspects of their profession. As one teacher shared, "Finally we will have a common vocabulary and approach to our jobs."

Implementation strategy: The messaged validated existing district efforts.

When House File 2272 was introduced, the majority of participants learned about the mandates through district channels. The district leadership, especially the curriculum director, sought to define the state mandates to local educators. He used the time lag between announcement of 2272 and implementation specifics to orchestrate the lines of communication for all teachers. As a result, teachers received a singular, controlled

interpretation of the new law and its potential impact. The superintendent confided, "We saw an opportunity to use this law to validate what we were already doing. We just blamed new changes on 2272." The principal further explained, "We used 2272 as an excuse to continue doing things we were already implementing at the elementary level and expand them to the secondary level." This was enhanced by the exercise of freedom in interpreting the law to local educators. The superintendent believed, "The intent of 2272 was to allow locals to paraphrase the goals and find local meaning." This interpretation gave local leaders great power. They worked quickly to embed the message into the local culture. They did not wait for the state to interpret the law. These leaders sat on advisory committees that helped shape many of the state interpretations. They felt they knew where the state was going and saw no reason to wait. This quick response moved the power of interpretation from the state level into local hands.

The implementation process included several elements. First, the administration set a strategy that benefited from the traditional appreciation of data. A teacher recalled:

> The curriculum director presented the mandates very positively at our first staff development meeting. He explained that in the past, we did things based on gut reactions. They were good reactions, but gut reactions aren't always right. Now, we will be right more often because we gathered data.

Second, leaders assured that the school's change efforts mirrored the accountability present in the local industries. Upon hearing the interpretation of the new mandates, the business community greeted the new accountability enthusiastically. They recognized the process of data collection and analysis from their workplaces. A school board member saw the change

as "a nice breath of fresh air that caused a celebration for those of us from the business world." This local validation further reinforced district leaders and their approach to change.

Impact of HF 2272 on the School

HF 2272 altered district practices and resource allocation.

The district and the board wasted little time aligning existing procedures and practices to the new mandates. To enhance the changes, hiring practices and job descriptions were immediately altered to align with the new significance of data collection and continuous improvement. An example would be the hiring of the present superintendent. A board member confided, "The board sought an individual who was eager to take on this new kind of opportunity." She also noted, "Other positions were filled by seeking out people to fill the newly defined roles. Candidates needed to have the skills necessary to implement change and be willing to exercise these skills." The board itself models their attention to data collection and interpretation. The superintendent noted that, "Board meetings now feature data analysis and improvement planning at each meeting." A teacher commented, "A confidence is found in making good decisions based on good data."

Resource allocations were altered to fall in line with the new mandates. Existing resources such as Phase III were redirected toward the new district goals of data collection and problem solving. As the curriculum director stated, "There was some real reshuffling of Phase III. Prior to 2272 we did a lot of individualized projects. Now, initiatives are more universal and related to our district goals." The use of other traditional resources, such as AEA, were impacted. The curriculum director noted, "I know that AEA takes some heat. But they provided us with some things we needed and could not get on our own." An example

was provided by a teaching veteran. "The AEA trained some local college kids to come in and work with our lowest kids. It has been quite helpful."

New funding in terms of a Goals 2000 plan was procured. The superintendent informed, "In the realm of new monies, I would refer to the Goals 2000 grant. That's what put it all together for us." The plan provided money and purchased time for teachers to work on the newly designed district goals. Visitations were conducted to model schools. The curriculum director noted, "Opportunities for research and development of new strategies was offered, which otherwise would be unavailable."

The implementation strategy brings a new appreciation for district leadership.

Teachers and building level administrators identified central office administrators, especially the curriculum director, as "developers of the district vision." The superintendent and curriculum director were relatively new. They were chosen by the board to provide a vision for the change process. A teacher noted, "These external forces [administrators] caused some new internal forces. We began to change our vision of success. We are now more data based and focusing on continual improvement than before." This continual improvement concept is key to the superintendent. "I don't think any of these attempts should cause something to happen forever. We need to keep building on it, keep changing." One of the new administrators commented:

> Sometimes going back to a single vision makes the task clearer to people and simpler, but you must widely share that vision. I think everyone must be able to say how everything relates back to the vision or the vision is wrong.

This leadership focused efforts and provided vision. This created a sense of security among teachers. As one teacher commented, "I don't think we could have begun this process without strong leadership from the top. They built a plan which made a lot of sense."

Changes in staff development.

Before HF 2272, the district focus was developing standards and benchmarks. Faculty was relieved that the standards development process aligned with the new mandates from the state. While surrounding districts began to focus on curriculum standards development, District B turned attention to developing assessments to match standards. They also began to develop new teaching strategies to achieve these standards. This transition felt natural to all concerned and the curriculum director was relieved that HF 2272 fueled the change, rather than central office. He informed, "It was a relief that the law was going to carry the ball for a while."

District leaders recounted the standards building process. First, department meetings were held. Phase III funding was used to divide departments into grade level teams. Trainers from the outside joined district staff development leaders to lead the standards-building process. The lowest grades began the process and passed their standards to the next level. This provided familiar building blocks to each subsequent group of teachers. Teachers were provided with a personal day to work with grade level teams. Not all teachers bought into the process originally. However, resistance to the plan lessened as two veteran teachers stepped forward to help lead the process. The curriculum director admitted that acceptance was not universal, "When people are in a mode to resist, we just go ahead and do it and later on make them believe in it." Throughout the process, an emphasis on the process was strong. A central

office leader offered, "We don't want to give the impression that these results will last forever. Our focus was the change process and building flexibility and capacity in the staff."

Barriers to Implementation

The administrative struggle with implementation logistics.

From the beginning, district leaders made it clear that the responsibility of implementation rests with the building administrators. As the superintendent stated, "The day-to-day leadership of building level administrators is expected by board members and the superintendent. Principals are responsible for achievement, not the curriculum director." However, rank and file see central office administrators as the change agents driving the improvement process. Board members and central office personnel see few problems with the accountability dichotomy. A board member clarified, "If we ever did have implementation problems, 2272 cleared them up. We hold everyone more accountable than ever before. The central office is responsible for the vision and the principals are responsible for carrying it out. We think we can separate the two."

Despite this confidence, educators sensed a lack of capacity that threatened implementation. Challenges existed with transferring policy to building-based practices. After a few years of site-based management, there was little internal consistency between principals. Each principal has a different approach and buildings are "separate islands." A clear message from central office often became convoluted as a result. A teacher gave voice to these concerns, "The mix of unifying district initiatives and separate building based implementation will be a challenge." This lack of implementation capacity further manifested itself in logistical problems. Problems such as awkward communications between buildings,

lack of common release times to work on mandates, technology problems, and increasing workload eventually discouraged participants. Reinvigoration of the teaming process was initiated to reduce the discontinuity. A principal reported, "Insufficient time had passed to determine the effectiveness of these new teams."

The lack of time exhausts teachers and narrows the curriculum.

All teachers viewed a lack of time as the major problem. Several teachers felt overwhelmed by the fast implementation timeline and increased workload. This lack of professional time has a negative impact on personal time. One teacher spoke for all, "We are working at night and on weekends to accomplish the plan. This cannot continue forever."

District leaders laid the "time problem" directly at the door of the legislature. If the legislature did not realize that more time was needed, local leaders believe they should have known. If the legislature could not pay for more time, the leaders wish that legislators would have slowed implementation or coerced school boards into providing more time. One central office administrator admitted:

> We can always use more time. Our board has been pretty adamant that teachers do not need more time away from students. They do not realize that a day away is necessary for effective days in the future. At this point, we have one half day per quarter to work on the mandates. When are we supposed to do this extra work?

Due to the lack of time, all teachers began to focus on the "big three" of math, science, and reading. Such problems lead one fine arts teacher to lament, "I know there are other things out there, but honestly, I don't have the time anymore. 2272 has really drawn every moth to the flame of math, science, and reading. What they measure gets done."

Teacher resentment of "being mandated from Des Moines."

During implementation, administration increasingly used HF 2272 as a vehicle to elicit change. As time wore on, there was increasing resentment for compliance when the district was asked by the state to repeat unsatisfactory efforts. Frustrations grew as leaders deflected the blame to the legislature or the Department of Education. This frustration magnified when mandates and changes originated far away in Des Moines. The curriculum director explained,

> Starting over bothers them. Teachers are notorious for wanting to get it right the first time. This change process will require patience as we stumble through. Unfortunately, we can't stop the other aspects of teaching and just focus on the mandates.

As starts and restarts continued, teachers became less open to the mandates of the legislature and the unsure nature of the implementation. One teacher voiced the rationalizing she observed in peers, "Teachers preferred to focus on complying with district standards rather than complying with the legislature in Des Moines. We want to run things locally." Still, the origin of the mandates seemed far away and the district itself seemed somewhat immune to criticism. One teacher galvanized this feeling, "We will not do it for the state, but we will do it for our district." Teachers stubbornly held loyalty to the local district, and withheld it from

Unintended Consequences

The imposition of strict guidelines results in lowered goals.

Implementation timelines and reporting are inflexible and cause unneeded paperwork. In fact, the mandates became counterproductive and caused the lowering of goals. Teachers

could not be convinced that lowering of goals was actually setting attainable goals. As one teacher contended:

> In our sports program, our goal is always to win the conference championship. We never want to just beat last year's record. We look forward, not back. We always set a goal that is attainable, but difficult to achieve. But, we don't have to worry about losing our funding if we don't achieve our goal.

Consequently, a goal-setting problem existed. This created a logistical problem that seemed impossible to correct. A veteran central office educator identified the crux of the problem:

> The evaluation of data and implementation of corrective changes are closely timed. That is, tests are taken in the fall. Short-term goals are set and plans are developed the following spring. Teachers were not contracted during the summer and funds did not exist to extend the contracted days. Therefore, training and implementation of the plan cannot begin until the fall. That was the same time you took the ITBS again. As a result, the interventions have no chance to work before testing. Implementation of changes cannot correct deficiencies before the next evaluation cycle. Next year's strategies will always be addressing last year's needs. It was illogical and created a real problem. There was no fix in sight.

The curriculum director tied the problem to its inevitable result, "The impossible implementation and reporting plan is a part of the reason 300 districts did not meet their goals this year. I wonder if anyone noticed?"

Since this situation makes quick improvement improbable, discussions have been held within the district about the feasibility of setting lower goals. It is better to set lower goals and "make sure I met my goals rather than to fill out the paperwork to explain why we

didn't meet the goals. Setting easily attainable goals is a lot less paperwork." Avoidance of paperwork became a motivating factor in the goal-setting process.

Overemphasis of standardized testing changes the nature of schooling.

District educators believed standardized test scores are becoming too important. Teachers assert that much of their curriculum efforts to raise student achievement are not measurable on standardized tests. An administrator condensed conversations with many teachers by saying:

> The legislature gets so wrapped up in achievement testing, they forget about the social and emotional needs of children. The human elements were downplayed. We had three goals in our district. One was achievement, the other two were social, not academic. No one cared about the other two anymore. They couldn't be measured easily, so they were not important. I contended that not everything important is easily measured by the ITBS. Was citizenship measurable in the ITBS? Did that mean America didn't value citizenship anymore?

A longtime educator offered advice, "If this was about a student's future, then it is set up wrong. Most people don't get fired because they don't or can't achieve. They got fired because they can't get along with other people, that's a social skill, not an academic skill." However, the message comes across that educators need to focus on what is measured and reported. A teacher voiced that dilemma:

> Tests are overemphasized. Where do you check when you take a kid shopping for school supplies or attend to parents going through rough times? What box on the CSIP do you check for that? Is there an ITBS question for that? I know that sounds cynical. But, sometimes the system makes you cynical.

Educators contended that schooling is a mix of academics and "real life soap operas" which continually affect the life of a child. Ignoring either need increases the likelihood of failure. As one educator offered:

> There must be more balance. Kids aren't computers. It isn't data in, data out. Now, we spend time more dealing with temperamental, moody computers that don't always work than we spend on the moods of kids. That's a clue how the system can get imbalanced.

Feeling overwhelmed and loss of classroom time causes resentment.

As the implementation phase of the mandates unfolded, much of the original enthusiasm began to wane. Some teachers reported feeling overwhelmed. These feelings led one teacher to state, "If they would just let me close my door, I would be just fine." A teacher leader lamented, "The work is so difficult and entailed that once we asked for volunteers, and not a single person volunteered. That's a big change for us." The teachers reported that the workload "grinds down" enthusiasm. Experienced teachers have noticed an increasing trend they recognized from the past. One building leader reports, "It's starting to feel like a rerun from previous change initiatives. I have heard colleagues say, "We have seen this stuff come and go. We'll just ride it out. A lack of time and resources has killed them in the past, it'll kill this one, too."

The district's lack of funding caused teachers to attend meetings and conferences during the school day, rather than during the summer. It was cheaper to hire a substitute teacher than pay the standard teacher wage during the summer or holidays. Therefore, any work time to achieve the mandate is provided by hiring subs. Teachers were forced to make tough choices. Teachers were asked to choose between working on the mandates or spending

time with children in the classrooms. One experienced educator offered, "If the change is something that can help us, I'm all for it and I will work hard. On the other hand, if it takes energy and time away from things that involve kids, then it is a negative." Another teacher added, "Students come to me during my free time. But I don't have time to really remediate or fix the problem. I just get them through the worksheet." Besides the day-to-day logistical problems of staff development, a central office administrator expressed his growing skepticism about the increasing mismatch between the big picture of HF 2272 implementation and local control:

> I'm not sure individual districts can be in charge of this anymore. Every district is reinventing the wheel over and over because we can't share our accomplishments and failures. No time exists to visit with each other and team with other districts. We're all too busy doing our own to help or share with anyone else. How long can that last?

Equivalent Expectations from all Districts

Educators believe the legislation is only good if everyone complies. But, many of the educators predict that different rules will apply to different districts. To make sure that everyone is complying across the state, a school board member suggests, "The state needs to do a true audit, not just papers. People need to visit and probe. Otherwise, how will they ever know whether people are complying with the spirit of the law?" A teacher is also concerned with the state's inability to oversee compliance, "If they don't have the money to help us implement, how can they afford to check on our compliance?"

Skepticism is high among district leaders that the system cannot be fair to all districts. The superintendent shared, "The small districts I have talked to don't have time to

implement. They just buy programs from someone or borrow them from other districts." The curriculum director explained:

> In some places, accountability is just something they add to some principal's job without taking anything away. How can that compare with a process like ours? We are hiring people specifically to help us meet these mandates. Success is related to the amount of personnel that's available to devote time to it. Large schools have an advantage in this respect.

Suggestions to Improve Future Mandates

A feeling that legislators don't listen

Lack of legislative support and adequate funding were continually mentioned by educators. As a result, some teachers felt unduly criticized and believed teacher morale is suffering in Iowa. One teacher stated, "We got lip service, but when it came to action, we always got cut or criticized. Support never came, just mandates." Another teacher contended that education is like any business:

> They ask us for change. Just like anywhere else, change costs more money. I thought legislators knew business. Change required research and development. Research and development cost money. Where was the money?

Participants suggested that legislators become better acquainted with their schools and talk with teachers. Participants also suggest providing more formalized opportunities for input from teachers and those close to schools. One teacher emphasized this lack of effective communication:

> If the legislation listened at all, they would know we already have too much paperwork. Now, the state is thinking about making sure our science curriculum is scientifically based. To me, that sounds like less science and more reports to fill out. Maybe that's what they wanted all along.

A lack of consistent vision from the legislature.

There is a growing sense among the educators that the legislature did not have a vision. This suspicion is based on the observation that legislators "jumped on and off reform bandwagons more often than educators." Participants believed that the present system does not give interventions the opportunity to work and will create knee-jerk responses. Especially ominous is a sense that the legislation is purposely restrictive and designed to fail. Proposed,

> It is almost certainly going to fail due to lack of support. I worry that when it fails, legislators will have a "too bad" attitude. The worst part is that I think the mandates could have been successful if they had just funded it and stuck with it.

A central office administrator worried, "If the teachers give up on this now, we will really be stuck. There is so much invested. I'm not sure we will be able to lead again." When asked whether the district was moving toward the vision the legislature held for Iowa schools, the principal confided, "I'm not sure anyone ever told me what the legislative vision really was."

Lack of legislative support.

Despite teachers' overall positive initial response to reform policies, the problems of implementation had eroded support. However, teachers still held hope that legislators could rescue the effort. One teacher advised, "The single greatest contribution the legislature could make was to provide teachers with more time." The curriculum director expanded, "The legislators said they would provide us more funds to buy more time. When the economy

worsened, legislators were unable to make good on time commitments. They bailed on us. But they don't want us to bail on them." The superintendent expressed the depth of the need by stating, "We'll kiss your ring or shine your shoes to get more time."

School C

Local Characteristics and Culture

District characteristics.

District C was a suburban setting that serves over three thousand students. The district had experienced continual growth since the early 1990s. The rapid growth of the community and school district was related to its status as an increasingly popular bedroom community for a large metropolitan area. This "new wealth" over the last two decades was enhanced by a shift from a farming culture to a more industrialized and commercial economic base. As a result, the community was more solid financially than 10 or 15 years ago. This fact was reflected in a free and reduced lunch population approximately half the state average. Despite this recent growth, the percentage of minority diversity was under the state average and few students were listed as English deficient.

The district had a healthy financial situation as revealed by a large cash reserve and a carryover exceeding the recommendations advanced by school financial planners. The average teacher salary exceeded the state average, but the average experience of the staff was well under the state average. The leadership of the district explained that the rapid growth of the district led to increased hiring in the last few years. Many of the new hires due to growth were teachers new to the profession. Much of the wealth was spent directly on student services. District expenditures per pupil greatly exceeded the state average.

The district contained several buildings with a K-5, 6-8, 9-12 structure. The buildings were relatively new or renovated since the 1950s. The district proudly associated the successful building projects to a strong relationship with the community, despite the proximity of a private school system nearby. This positive relationship was evidenced by the extensive involvement of citizens in several large advisory committees. The communication between the district and its community was carried through multiple pipelines to the community. These included articles in the local newspapers, newsletters, and an extensive Web site.

Achievement was a focus for all district efforts and well over 60% of students in grades 4, 8, and 11 were proficient in math and reading. The district met its educational goals and took pride in that fact. As the principal explained, "When you have the resources to meet your goals, you meet your goals." The percentage of dropouts was well below the state average.

The district was known throughout the state as a leader in staff development. The superintendent explained, "We had a lot of schools that came in here to get advice and take a look at what we're doing. For some, our new look is a total transformation from what they were doing." The confidence this planning built in a longtime staff member was obvious:

> The new mandates validated what we were already doing. We didn't gear our planning for compliance, we geared it for our community. It's as if we wrote parts of the new law. We already had it figured out.

A newly arrived teacher added, "I'm not saying this in an arrogant way, but this school has always been out there. They stand out. They are up to date and they've gotten a vision. That's why I want my kids here, and I came here for a job."

The local culture.

This change presented a small town flavor that allured new community members. A longtime educator reflected, "We're a small town inside a bigger town. We value being small. We had people whose grandparents went to school here. Some of the teachers taught your father and your grandfather. Generations of teachers serve generations of citizens." A teacher of long-standing offered, "People tended to stay here because we try to make it feel like home. If they leave, they tended to come back. A lot of our teachers went to school here. This small town atmosphere continued to flourish despite the growth. As one teacher noted:

> We have been able to control the growth by having good communications systems. We keep our campus small and compacted. We visit with other teachers a lot. We talk a lot with parents. In many ways the town and the school feels the same as we did fifteen years ago. We are just bigger. That is what draws so many people here. I hope that type of culture never changes.

Local Perceptions of Policy Intent

The cost of declining status.

Educators believed declining standardized test scores and unfavorable comparisons to foreign countries created an atmosphere that demanded improvement from American schools. One teacher offered, "The legislature wanted to make sure that Iowa's education stayed at a very high level. You could keep people here or encourage them to come here." Especially at the onset, educators held great trust in the legislators and the goals of the legislation. One educator stated, "They [legislators] must have known that some schools

weren't doing what they needed to do." In those cases, educators felt that legislators acted in the best interests of Iowa schools.

Many educators felt the need for reform came specifically from standardized test results. One teacher offered, "I think ITBS test scores and other test scores were the basis of legislative decisions. They believed that we are not able to compete with the Japanese kids or other nations, so they decided we are not doing our jobs." However, one educator believed a few teachers are responsible for the mandates on all teachers,

> I am sure there were some teachers not doing everything they need to do. Places where teachers aren't being very professional and test scores are not good. To get them to come around, they had to make all of us prove we were doing our jobs. Kinda like punishing the whole class for what a few aren't doing. It's affected all of us, but I thought if you were doing what you are supposed to be, you should not be threatened.

Impact of federal pressure.

District leaders believed 2272 resulted from national pressure to improve education. The superintendent noted, "The state of Iowa needed to get the feds off their case so they had no choice, they had to change Iowa education." A central office planner explained how this federal pressure trickled down to individual states. He believed:

> Major players in each state met and planned with their peers from other states and formed networks. That was, the chief state school officers are all part of the same club. Legislative majority leaders had their own little association and networks. As a result, the goal of improving education is the same all over. General directions were planned at the national level but each state had a unique culture which must be taken into account.

Expanding on that sentiment, the superintendent pointed out that differences in state cultures produced different local results. He explained:

> Unlike Texas and Kentucky, who were centralized in education, Iowa's history of local control should give the opportunity for each district to find meaning from the improvement process. I did not believe a specific blueprint exists for Iowa school districts for improvement. I thought our district was attempting to take advantage of the middle ground between comprehensive school reform and local control.

Central office and administration have embraced this opportunity to reform their school. A central office administrator echoed the sentiment of all district leadership. He expressed confidence that "the new mandates would be the right tonic for Iowa's educational challenges." He stated:

> I think this Iowa's law has been exquisitely crafted to find middle ground between local and state control. I know why they assigned the agreements and how they did it. If they just stay the course, it could be an incredible success story.

He went on to explain that, "It's messier, it's inefficient. You have everyone reinventing the wheel to a large extent. But only we knew what it took to implement change in our district." Iowa had traditionally benefited from a good support system. Historically, Iowa had shown strong government support for education. The superintendent cautioned, "Of course, that support assumed that the traditional power structure of the governor, the Department of Ed and key legislators. They must have had reached some kind of consensus regarding strategy."

Increased public accountability in exchange for increased spending.

Local educators believed accountability for public spending and the desire to increase teacher salaries required increased scrutiny of achievement. Educators agreed that such

increased accountability would not go away. One educator offered, "Our society is ever changing and people want to know why and how money is being spent."

Teachers believed salaries needed to be increased so education could stay competitive. However, controversy would surround any increases. A central office administrator believed, "Public education was always a hot topic politically." He also believed that legislators realized teachers' salaries must rise. A teacher agreed and strategized, "If I was a legislator, and I wanted to give a chunk to salaries, that is, to put my money where my mouth is, I would have to show the public what teachers are doing."

The politics of educational reform.

The original optimism toward the legislation was strong among leadership, but was waning in the rank and file. Teachers were especially discouraged when politicians hold education hostage to political maneuvering. An educator explained how politics surface in the mix:

> One obvious example was the recent Ritalin debate in the Iowa legislature. This was just one example that underscored the misunderstandings and political distractions that hinder progress and focus. Educators could never prescribe, and never want to prescribe medicine. This topic was a waste of time and distracted from meaningful dialogue.

A second concern hinted that small schools were unable to meet the standards. Educators suspected that the hardships on schools were designed to encourage consolidation. One administrator reported:

> I've heard of superintendents who took every report they had, like the Phase III report and technology and just threw them all in a box and sent the box in to the DE.

Because if you get in a small district, you're the only one. Who is going to do all this? Don't you think those inequities cause hardships by design?

As one teacher put it, "If legislators feel that we should close small schools, stop playing politics and just say so. Then act accordingly. Just close them."

Impact on the Schools

Dissemination of the policy information.

Most educators believed the original communications regarding the mandates were sketchy and incomplete. There seemed to be a gap of time between the public announcement of the policy and when details filtered into the district. One educator voiced this sentiment, "I think eventually an adequate explanation was given, but not at the beginning. Maybe that was the job of the middle person, the Department of Education. I'm not sure." Due in large part to this lag in communication follow-through, teachers began to study on their own and draw their own meanings from the legislation. Differences in the depth of understandings occurred as a result. Some team leaders or teachers working with special projects or the Area Education Agency knew more about the mandates. However, rank and file did not understand the history, origin, or purposes of the legislation. One educator informed, "I'm well versed because I'm a team leader in language arts. I studied the law and its changes. That's my job, so that's what I did." However, another teacher lamented, "I am not one of the key departments [math, reading or science], so I don't know much about it." This lack of continuity caused teachers to draw their own conclusions. For example one teacher believed, "I knew there was much concern that those standards would be used as a measuring stick for evaluating teachers."

Now, most teachers agreed that information flowed from or through the central office. A teacher informed that the curriculum director was the source of information and inspiration. The teacher believed, "Now, the curriculum director is the source of all news about change."

Focusing on excellence.

Although all interviewees felt their district was traditionally ahead of the curve with compliance, many felt that the legislation pulled reluctant teachers on board. One administrator commented, "It pulled in those who were loosely coupled with our previous plan. The positions of the state were very helpful." Teachers have also noticed an added professionalism in their colleagues. One experienced teacher shared, "I hear a difference in teachers. I know many teachers have already made changes because they started asking themselves, 'so why did I do this activity, anyway'?" A counselor mentioned the change in process for academic achievement, "As a counselor, I now identify more closely every student who is failing. The other counselor and I talk to every student who got an F in any academic subject each trimester. The ownership of every failure was shared by everyone now."

Teachers also noticed a change in staff development. Historically, a big focus for the district had been curriculum mapping. The mandates were focusing more on measuring achievement and less on creating more maps. Teachers feel content-specific strategies such as curriculum mapping moved into the background. A teacher commented, "Our maps are a little outdated. Now, we used them primarily to educate and inform parents." Since the mapping process had slowed or finished, teachers shifted emphasis to measuring effectiveness of lessons. Now, data collection and interpretation make up the bulk of staff

development. District leadership believed the state goal of accountability was now ingrained locally as data collection and analysis. Teachers recalled this emanating from the superintendent. A teacher recalled the superintendent's first meeting with staff, "The first year he was here, he put up a slide that said, In God we trust, everyone else needs data."

The changing role of leadership in policy implementation.

The accountability legislation shone a strong light on leadership. The teaching staff consistently identified central office leadership as the catalyst for improvement plans. A previous AEA employee, now working for the district, verified this belief, "I got to see all the improvement plans. It was pretty obvious which ones were written with a true vision. I chose to leave AEA and come here because this leadership knew which way to go."

The teachers viewed the leadership with a great admiration and believed they had unusually strong administration. The curriculum director elaborated, "Places don't succeed without great leadership. There was a chemistry among the leadership here. It went beyond just filling up someone's weaknesses with someone else's strengths."

A concerted effort to develop and encourage leadership capacity was a fundamental strategy in the district. Leaders felt they bred leadership capacity in their staff and controlled how this leadership manifested itself for the benefit of the district. One administrator clarified, "We had clearly developed a culture of developing leadership. Originally, this was a small district culture. It was a huge shift to go from teachers as classroom supervisors to teachers as leaders." Another administrator went even farther, "When I talk about building leadership capacity, I'm not talking about names, I'm talking about a strategy and structure which favors leaders. It's amazing. Each year it's a different little club of leaders."

The present leadership caste was also encouraged to focus on broad sweeping improvements rather than management. The school board purposefully developed positions to handle managerial tasks, allowing leaders to focus on higher order tasking. A board member offered, "We have gotten better control of the huge paperwork snarl by hiring community relations people to do some of the writing for us. We intend to concentrate our leadership efforts on the big picture." To accomplish this focus on the big picture, leaders sat on steering committees at the state and national level. The curriculum director worked to derive the "direction of the wind" before the wind started blowing. He emphasized the importance of "being out in front of the pack" and engaged in advance planning for the district. Without exception, leaders exuded a sense of pioneer excitement to teachers. This spirit invigorated seasoned staff and attracted new staff and quality administrators. A teacher offered this observation, "It started with the superintendent. She must be comfortable with herself. Comfortable enough to hire hard-chargers all around her. That allows leadership to be a cluster of people, not one person. By yourself, you couldn't do much."

Changing staff development to a business model that is self-sustaining.

Engineers of the new district student achievement planning purposely applied a business model to their district. The curriculum director informed:

> We had all departments explore what their core business really was. We shook everyone's tree and created systems where compliance was self-sustaining. The mandates were key in making compliance inevitable. The law ensured that changes would occur.

The leaders believed the new systems were a vast improvement over past methods. The curriculum director took us back historically, "It used to be, hit the ball and drag everybody

to first base with you. You did things that were driven by one person. One person couldn't anchor any change solidly in policy." The issue for the visionaries of the district was sustainability. A key district administrator asked, "How do you anchor change? He answered by explaining:

> The answer was that you anchor state mandates into school policy. That was really where the state comes in handy. Permanent change required inescapable mandates from the state power structure. The state needed to solidify the change process in concrete. They needed to button you down so tight you couldn't escape.

He then offered the second step of the process:

> Then you anchor it in publicly expected events at the local level. Conferences, ceremonies, and rituals. Otherwise, every time administrations or school boards change, policies are at risk and the organization pendulums back and forth.

As an administrator offered, "Now it was a cultural thing. You were really pushing on this thing, but you've pushed on it so many times, a lot of people have faith in it. That's how businesses changed and that is how we will change."

The benefits of localizing the mandates.

The district developed a strategy of localizing the mandates. The district began by translating them into local language. That is, the district determined the crux of the law and purposely matched the rhetoric to local problems. The curriculum director initiated the process by asking hard questions that opened the classrooms to public scrutiny. These were questions the staff and the public could not ignore. Examples included, "Is it possible for a kid to graduate from your school and not be able to pass a GED?" This question and others caused the staff and the public to put difficult issues on the table. These issues were the heart

of the legislation, but the translation to local terms caused it to feel less like a mandate and more like a local initiative. In fact, many teachers never did realize that the process was mandated by the state. As one teacher put it, "You could ask the majority of teachers about 2272 and they won't know what you are talking about."

The superintendent believes approaching the mandates as a local issue, rather than a state mandate, rallied the troops. Administrators note, "Our scores just went off the chart this year. Our proficiency rate had been hovering around 60 to 65% the last five years. Not too good. This year it was over 80 in about everything." Implementation must then be viewed as a success. The strategy of adding local flavor to state mandates proved successful during its first year.

Barriers to Implementation

Time.

The mandates created a time crunch. All educators believed that time was the most limiting factor to successful implementation. The lack of time to address the new paperwork caused an educator to wonder:

> How many things can you fit into the day? How many things can you keep on your plate? In a district which was committed to technology, simply learning the technology took so much time that there wasn't always time to develop the data to input.

As one veteran explained, "As an adult, it took longer to become computer efficient. If that was the vehicle of reporting and gathering information, it slowed everything down and created pressure."

The added time requirements diverted time away from the classroom and other initiatives. Although the district attempted to purchase teacher time or provide substitutes, much of the work intruded into private lives. As one experienced teacher complained, "They give us the training and the technology, but there isn't nearly enough time to put those two things together. We need plain, old-fashioned work time."

The mandates add to teacher stress and reluctance to change.

Teachers identified two reasons that teachers resisted the mandates. These reasons included increasingly stressful workloads and the reluctance of some experienced teachers to change. First, teachers felt the paperwork, socially complex student issues, and new skills necessary to implement district improvement caused increased stress. One experienced teacher mentor expressed caution, "Some people got their backs up against the wall and felt stressed because they could never downshift. Constantly increasing workloads took a long time to adjust to, if you ever could. Sometimes it needed to slow down." Another teacher expressed more specific concerns:

> People needed to know that it is a high stress job. I believed we deserve every dollar we get. There were many teachers who felt that ever day was like going to war. Research shows that we had stress levels as high as soldiers in a war. I know there are kids who challenge you every single day and you are wiped out at the end of the day. You have very little down time. Fast paced days with lots of needy people. The alcohol, drugs, and abuse. It's prevalent and it very much affected you and the kids.

Teachers eventually learned to cope with this stress if they were to stay in the profession. However, those accommodations cause teachers to develop coping mechanism

that favor patterns in their teaching. A teacher expressed the comfort that was developed in these patterns:

> Experience is a barrier in itself. It's very easy to do what you have always done. You find what works and stick with it. As a result, it's safe and you're safe. You don't want to risk losing control during the change process. It takes so long to get it back.

Resources.

When district leaders first heard of the mandates, they felt apprehensive. As the superintendent noted, "My first thought was 'What had they done to us now? Were they going to supply us with any funding to do this'?" The curriculum director believed that gathering control of available funding sources was key, especially if the new mandates were not funded adequately. His concerns about possible unfunded mandates seemed prophetic as he stated:

> They rolled out this grandiose plan, but no one checked to see if there was any money. I think they're getting a heck of a lot for a little bit of money right now. They were getting more out of this than anyone thought they would.

Since little new money was provided, leaders became more creative financially. The curriculum director believed, "The rearrangement of Phase III was significant in gaining control of the focus of staff development. That change provided the money." Although educators believed their district was more affluent than most, one teacher offered, "The resources were never completely adequate." Although staff worried about a lack of money, they had confidence in leadership's ability to find a solution. One key teacher stated, "It's amazing. The district always finds a way to coerce us or something. I don't know how they did it."

Unintended Consequences

A focus on standardizing everything from tests to paperwork.

In general, educators were opposed to state tests. However, they believed that federal pressure to find a standardized assessment was more than Iowa could bear. As the curriculum director commented:

> I know why they signed on to the ITBS, because it was the most common thing done. But, there were so many other ways that they could have done the same thing without forcing everyone to look the same in terms of these test reports.

District leaders resented the standardizing practices of the mandates. The leadership felt they had always known that poverty had a devastating impact on schooling. The curriculum director argued:

> We coded all this stuff on ITBS as to whether a kid is free or reduced or whatever. I'm thinking; folks, we already knew what we are going to find out from this. Poverty had a direct relationship to achievement. No surprise there. To me it seemed like a slap in the face, so I resented having to do that. I would rather use that time to improve achievement.

Educators also questioned using ITBS tests as a highly publicized, almost exclusive measure of student achievement. The superintendent confided:

> The unfair publicizing of testing results cast some districts in a favorable light and unfairly appeared negative for others. It gave the *Register* and other newspapers something easy to compare schools with. We did very well. In fact, we were front

> page in the newspaper and two more articles in the second section. It was cool and really great for us.

However, he also admitted, "Other schools around us got beat up by it. It isn't fair because we all have such different populations."

When the conversation turned to sanctions, the central office leaders were very skeptical about Iowa's perseverance. The curriculum director believed:

> The state did not have the resources or personnel to take over failing schools. Not the way they were cutting at the Department of Ed. How were you going to keep doing those five-year reviews with fewer people? That was one of the main parts related to accountability in this system. It didn't make sense to make threats you can't follow through on.

Driving educators from the profession.

Most educators interviewed believed the implementation timeline was unreasonable and had been detrimental. One veteran teacher commented, "Let's not pass a bill and three months later think that we're going to be able to have things in place. Everyone tried to change but there is so much stress in some districts. People are bailing."

Veteran teachers were concerned that the system seemed overwhelming to young teachers, especially new and inexperienced teachers. They believed this workload moved the teacher shortage from bad to worse. A veteran of two decades warned:

> The only advice I gave was a caution to bear in mind; you're overwhelming new teachers. The feeling of being overwhelmed by tasks was probably not as bad for me. I've been in education forever and you just kind of get used to being overwhelmed. I looked at some of our new teachers, everything was brand new and I think, oh my

> gosh, you've got your individual teacher goal projects, mentoring projects, and all of the building work. It was all good, but boy, they are fried. I hope they stick with it.

Administrators are also mulling the balance between workload and rewards in Iowa. Iowa's retirement rules and the demands of the new mandates made surrounding states attractive to administrators. The most experienced central office administrator, often referred to as the driving force of the district, remarked:

> The state said you need an earnings cap for retiring administrators. They also create more work. I was offered jobs many times in the past. The best decision I ever made was to stay here. Now, I ask myself, why should I stay here? I'll have the rule of 88 next year. Heck, I'd be better off moving to another state.

Compliance issues push equity issues to the back burner.

Educators noticed a shift in state attention toward compliance issues and away from older, traditional equity mandates. Central office personnel noticed less emphasis on traditional multicultural-nonsexist requirements. One central office educator commented:

> Our MCNS efforts have fallen way back. We used to work hard on those things because we're somewhat rural, and we needed diversity education. Concerns about compliance to achievement issues went way up, and concerns about equity issues went way down. There were only so many hours in the day.

The curriculum director also expressed a concern about the same topic:

> When we had our equity audit, we'd get dinged on some things. They were not the centerpiece anymore. Our system said a single focus got things done. If you had one goal, you had one goal. If you had two goals, you had half a goal. The state decided which business we were in so we could focus. Otherwise, you're damned either way.

The focus on content hurt pedagogy.

Middle school educators noticed a focus on content standards and curriculum mapping that required large amounts of time and energy. As a result, pedagogies such as middle school concept took a back seat. An administrator offered:

> Ten years ago we focused on horizontal collaboration within grade levels to develop interdisciplinary units. Lately, we focused on departments. Even though our interdisciplinary teams meet every day, often times the agenda is taken up by student issues or vertical issues like curriculum mapping.

The principal worried, "I needed to be a little stronger with middle school initiatives. But with all the focus within discipline departments, interdisciplinary stuff may be hard to start again. We can only lead in one direction at a time."

The mandates slowed us down.

The vision and intuition of leadership had moved the district far ahead of other Iowa districts in focusing on student achievement. In fact, it was widely acknowledged by locals that the state department often visited to develop models for statewide programs. It is not surprising to district leaders that the mandates actually slowed down their progress. The superintendent lamented,

> For us, I think it got in our way. I think we were headed down the path to achieve all the mandates and more. I don't think it improved our plan or the direction we were heading. We were more progressive and faster track before the legislation.

Although leaders conceded that paperwork accountability was necessary for some districts, many didn't believe improvement would come from filling out paperwork. The superintendent commented "Now we have to write a thesis to explain what we are doing. I

think the CSIP was more of an essay contest. It took away from other things we could have accomplished."

Suggestions to Improve Future Mandates

Mismatching simple solutions to complex systems.

Many teachers believed that the public had a false sense of what education was like nowadays. As a result, the public was very critical. One teacher explained this feeling, "Parents say, you know that's not the way it was when I was in school. We sat in rows and now you sit in pods and work in the hallway. I don't get it." Teachers know that tradition is related to comfort. But comfort often went against what teachers were learning about learning styles. A teacher offered, "Teaching has always been more complex than everyone thought, now we just have the proof." The curriculum director provided advice, "Even if it created classrooms that were different than the past, our knowledge base is thicker than ever before and we needed to move based on that knowledge. I think our legislators needed to understand that also."

The superintendent believed policies were negatively affected by unanticipated complexity. He conjectured:

> I'm sure the legislature did not realize that some schools are wholly different from one another. Legislators looked at the way things were happening in some schools like ours and said, why isn't this happening in all schools? My answer would be, level the playing field financially and you can raise the whole bunch of them. If the money is even, the achievement will be even.

Listen to the locals.

Teachers felt the answer for better legislation was easy. Just listen to those in the field. Too often it seemed that legislation was made by going around teachers, without talking with them. One prominent local educator asked, "If the legislature wants better test scores, why don't they just ask us? We know how to make them better. More of us had master degrees than not. We had educated opinions, not guesses." Going further, one educator was offended by the lack of input, "When they don't seem to care about our opinions, it seemed condescending to many of us. I think they relied too much on one district which happens to be close to the capitol." As if to confirm the relationship between teacher perceptions and degree of involvement, a few district educators were actually involved in the planning phase of the mandates. A few teachers sat on steering committees for 2272 or were given input through Area Education Agencies. These educators were more positive than others. Their perceptions were more loyal to the original legislative intent and the legislators. One educator sat on a planning committee for the Department of Education. She responded, "Our legislation will change education for the better. I know because I was there." This type of personal involvement developed ownership in the participants. As if to validate that perception, a veteran of 20 years felt left out. She advised:

> Talk more to teachers since there aren't many teachers in the legislature anymore. They needed to get to know educators so they can trust us. Then, they could enlist the help of professionals before they make more laws and mandates about education.

Also, locals advised greater involvement in policy making, not waiting for the implementation phase. The superintendent advised, "Involve the School Board Association, SAI, ISEA, so that there is a commitment on all parts. Just don't throw it at us and say this is what you're doing [pause], because we said so."

Create a stable philosophy legislative philosophy toward education.

Practitioners wondered what the legislators wished to create a philosophy for school policy building. They believed no such stable philosophy currently exists. A counselor groused:

> I'm not certain what kind of assessment they used to get a handle on where schools were in the first place. I'm meaning that if the legislature had an idea of their ultimate vision, I'd like to see it stated openly as part of an Iowa school philosophy.

When asked about the philosophy of the legislature, an experienced educator complained,

> They were saying we needed to improve, but they really didn't say how. So, they were putting pressure on us to make changes without targets. But, I guess, if they didn't know where they were, it was pretty hard to tell someone else how to change. We never did that to kids. I told kids that certain things will be on the test so that they know how to improve. We don't pull something out of our hat at the end and say, now take the test. You don't even know what to study or what you're talking about.

Educators were wondering if there was a philosophy, or even a mechanism, to design a philosophy. They worried that legislators were flying blindly. They worried that legislators did not know schools, did not know research about schools, but did know that they needed to respond to national pressure. An administrator worried:

> If they were only doing this for compliance, that's all they would get, compliance. But every dollar we spend on proving compliance, is one less dollar for actually making schools better. There is an old saying, A hog doesn't gain weight by weighing it. It only gains by feeding it. They need to feed Iowa schools if they want more results.

Build policy that builds capacity.

Leadership believed a gap existed in capacity-building policies that created incentives for excellence. A central office administrator advanced:

> When I talked about policy development, I was talking about capacity building. For example, develop policy that provided incentives for people to perform at a high level opposed to just existing in the status quo. There are a couple of groups out there doing this kind of stuff. Study them and report back to the rest of us.

Educators believed that capacity building in the area of staff development, teacher observations and teaming were critical to give teachers the tools to improve. Teachers reminded, "This is a market driven economy. You get what you pay for. You are already getting the best education in the nation. If you want more than that, get ready to pay for it." Along these same lines, the curriculum director offered:

> I often think of Susan Fuhrman and others who have separated out different kinds of policy. One of the policies questions that intrigued me was, how do you write capacity-building policy? An example might be, for those nurses and teachers in the high poverty areas, we'll forgive your loans. You get the ripple effects back. How do you weave incentives into a system? How do you incentivize educational practice? The legislators need to reward what they value. If they believe we don't have the capacity, give us more capacity by increasing funding. If they believe we already have the capacity, give us incentives to change. Read the research.

Even active districts require more resources.

Due to growth in the district, resources became more abundant during this decade. Admittedly, the expanded resources changed the educational landscape. The wise application

of the new wealth greatly enhanced achievement. An administrator explained how the increase in resources had greatly enhanced the district's ability to reach their goals:

> We haven't always had the resources that we have the last couple of years. In the past, we were not able to make much progress. These additional resources have greatly enhanced our ability to get the job done. We will not make more progress without more resources. Even here, we are running short.

In spite of the relative abundance of resources in comparison to other Iowa districts, concerns existed. Many of the educators identified a common belief that a downturn in the economy would eventually slow or stop the reform initiative. A teacher commented:

> We needed additional technology support. It is never enough to give your staff computers and say, just figure it out. If our technology money ever dwindled, we would be right back where we started. It would be a disaster. That would dishearten the whole profession.

Teachers believed that disaster was only as far away as the next downturn in the economy.

Discussion

In all three schools, common themes emerged in each of the six areas of interest. The areas included: (a) a history of active schooling and supportive communities built capacity, (b) initial communications challenge schools to increase standardized test scores or risk Iowa's education status, (c) HF 2272 narrows curriculum and provides an intense focus, (d) a shortage of resources and time hinder implementation and darken teacher perceptions,

(e) unintended consequences result in increased paperwork and decreased community involvement as teachers leave the profession, and (f) educators plead for resources and access to legislators.

Preexisting school culture meets HF 2272.

All three districts enjoyed a reputation of relative wealth and the strong leadership it could buy. Successful business districts provided taxes and bond issues for attractive facilities, above average pay scales, high teacher retention rates, and staff stability. For years, these schools exhibited aggressive staff development programs and a continual emphasis on improvement. These districts became known, as one board member described, "as shining lighthouse districts." This constant activity and notoriety caused communities to believe their schools were active long before. The community offered continuing support as a result.

Each district had a history of attracting and retaining active and visionary leadership. These leaders were significant throughout the change process by localizing the mandates, building a capacity favoring change, and attracting other active leaders. These active leaders are identified in the literature review as "strategic interactors." Strategic interactors were critical to transference of policy in each district. Fuhrman et al. (1991) suggest these leaders seized opportunity, coordinated and expanded state policies to meet their needs, and anticipated and actively shaped state policy." The district interactors traveled, attended meetings, and advised (and were advised by) state planners. This insider knowledge created a mystique of being ahead of the curve. Interactors took command of the message when new mandates arrived. As Fullan (2002) contends, successful implementation will occur when top-down policy mandates are blended with bottom-up implementation strategies. The

strategic interactors blended HF 2272 into the preexisting culture. As a result, teachers initially commented on "the seamless, natural feel of the change process."

Historically, interactors encouraged an active environment by frequent introduction of new initiatives. Each district reported introducing several different initiatives over the years. Teachers practiced implementation strategies. Lines of communication were created, teaming was employed, and articulation of curriculum was common. The theme of teaming was highly supported in the literature. Schmoker (1999) advised that teaming is the foundation of enhancing achievement. Strategies were employed effectively at the level of instruction. Cohen and Hill (2001) echoed the strategy by suggesting that education is bottom-heavy and real change can only happen at the bottom of the pyramid, the classroom. Accountability measures, such as logs and reflections, were common although not universal.

These districts developed quick reactions to new demands or changes in the educational environment. This process is also suggested in the works of Firestone (1989), who believed that organizations learned how to innovate by implementing innovations. Action provides a chance to break negative amplifying cycles in organizations. Firestone further asserts that these districts are especially receptive and aggressive when they determine that the policies meet their needs.

This frequent action also created a constant hum of activity. This activity attracted other active professionals. One arrived leader reported that, "The district was always out there toward the edge. That's why I came here. I wanted to work here and raise my kids here." The rich got richer as quality leaders attracted other quality leaders.

Local perceptions of policy intent: Raise standardized test scores.

Locals could identify no single original source of information at the state level for communicating policy. They identified differing sources of information including unions, personal readings, word of mouth, newspaper articles, and several others. However, all could identify why the policy was necessary, to raise Iowa's declining test scores or lose their preeminent status in education. All Iowans considered education one of their few mechanisms to draw and hold citizenry. A threat to education concerned all Iowans. An educator summed up the general feeling, "In Iowa, education is an ego thing. It's about being the best in the nation at something." Erosion of this resource would harm Iowa's reputation and economy. In addition, the loud national drumbeat for compliance was also heard in Iowa. Locals believed that intense national pressure was exerted through a threatened loss of funding to money-starved schools. Iowa legislators had no choice but to comply. Standardized scores must go up.

While the HF 2272 was being developed, active school leaders attended enticing discussions held at the state level. They report discussions that hinted about funding increases for education and teacher salaries. It was suggested that increases were contingent on increased accountability for student learning. The vague hints at incentives helped accountability gain acceptance among these leaders. These locals intuitively sensed the power of what McDonnell and Elmore (1987) refer to as incentives. Incentives would enhance improvement, but variation would occur at all sites. The possibility of variation of outcomes for each site encouraged leaders. Buoyed by the hints of incentives, strategic interactors returned home and prepared their districts for action.

HF 2272 changed capacity building, centralized power, and narrowed the curriculum.

The traditional wealth of these schools created diverse curriculums. Strong programs in the liberal arts, practical arts, and activities generated community pride. This constant flow of wealth also built "a capacity for change" into the culture of the district. However, HF 2272 changed the playing field. For the first time, this capacity for change was being applied to a new policy design. Instead of cutting edge innovations being valued, practices that standardized schools were now in vogue. The district must now work to narrow, rather than broaden, curriculum and practices.

During the implementation process, each district leadership team sensed the mandates required, or provided opportunity for, a new centralizing of power in school districts. A resurgence in the roles of superintendent and curriculum director were realized. The superintendent contended that "the extreme focus reeled in autonomous building administrators and teachers." This development would bode poorly for local control but well for eliminating the autonomy which Cohen and Hill (2001) identified as a hindrance to improving teaching.

Standardizing practices between buildings were encouraged as departments met K-12 rather than in the traditional grade level teams. The focus became longitudinal. That is, emphasis was given to department standards and curriculum mapping. Horizontal articulation between different disciplines within a grade level decreased. As a result, initiatives like middle school concept suffered.

All teacher goals and strategies must now be linked to the district goals. As a result, many teachers rejoiced that the traditional "hodgepodge" of goals and staff development

would be focused or replaced by streamlined, unified systems. However, leaders realized this historic hodgepodge actually prepared the district for the implementation of the new policies. Active schools' leaders worried that this loss of activity would make schools more compliant but less innovative. One administrator concluded, "We are selling our souls. Compliance will make us more like everyone else, but I'm not sure that was what we wanted. Our greatness was due to our different way of looking at the world. We were successful because we were different."

HF 2272 and the associated standardized testing created an extreme focus on math, science, and reading. Available resources were refocused on the "big three," while other disciplines and pedagogy initiatives languished. Teachers in non-core areas struggled to incorporate reading and math into band and physical education curriculums. This outcome was predicted by Popham (2002) and others. These teachers admitted feeling outside the mainstream initiatives and a reduced status of "second class citizen" was felt in the arts. They report that their continued cooperation was in doubt. Pedagogy-based initiatives such as thematic units, multiple intelligences training, cooperative learning, and others have seen a decline in interest. A common sentiment was voiced by a veteran mentor who offered, "I don't think we even offer cooperative learning to new teachers anymore." Cooperative learning had previously been a district mainstay in staff development. Also relegated to the back burner were previously state-mandated priorities such as equity education.

Barriers to implementation: The legislature mandates more work.

Two major barriers were identified by educators. These barriers included a lack of additional resources for additional workload, time, and a resentment of being dictated to from afar. Formerly adequate resources were now in short supply. Educators complained that the

mandates were extremely underfunded. Resources were often scrounged by diverting from other projects to accountability. Occasionally, specialists were hired to provide additional expertise to accomplish the goals. The once belittled Area Education Associations, whose services are free, gained acceptance and assisted mightily in the implementation process. Educators commented that, "the AEA staff provided expertise and helped develop vision" and ensured compliance. In addition, grants were written and existing resources such as Phase III were reallocated to align with the changes.

More significantly, as predicted by Tye and O'Brien (2002), a lack of funding for monetary rewards created a sense of abandonment among some teachers. Teachers felt a breach in the implied covenant linking increased accountability with increased rewards. Subsequent legislation provided mentoring and raises for new teachers, but experienced teachers received few benefits from the changes they engineered. Experienced teachers felt they had been down this road before. They became more skeptical and felt that this too shall pass.

The resource in shortest supply was time. Locals identified an alarming lack of time to implement and practice the new initiatives. This time crunch manifested itself in three ways. First, resistance grew as teachers and administrators felt an imposition on professional time to accomplish the goals set forth by the legislation. Traditional teacher activities suffered. Increased workloads took teachers away from the students during the work week. Teachers experienced less time to remediate students before and after school as well as during free periods. Less time was available for the "social needs of kids." As McLaughlin (1987) and others warned, teachers must have the time to team and grow professionally. Without this time, government may increase teacher dissatisfaction.

Secondly, all educators complained of an imposition into their private lives. Teachers felt deprofessionalized as they worked without reimbursement. Resentment grew as nights and weekends were now engaged in enabling the change process. As an administrator admitted, "My personal time really has taken a big hit." Another administrator regrets not leaving "For private business when she had the chance." Tye and O'Brien (2002) predict that many of these educators will abandon the profession for private business.

Finally, the extremely short timelines for implementation created a frenzy of activity in active districts and an assumed stupor in less active districts. Active districts hired staff to deal with the increased workload, rewrote job descriptions, and robbed unspent balances to move toward compliance. These leaders grimaced when asked about smaller or less active districts. They related stories of dumping all the reports in a box or stealing from the work of neighboring districts. Elmore (2002) predicted these results in the literature review by stating, "Those most likely to succeed in implementing state policy are those least in need of it. While those with a weak curricular core tend to respond by gaming the system."

Since the leadership often used the mandates as leverage for the change process, teachers began to resent being dictated to from the legislature in Des Moines. Only a strong campaign of localizing the mandates kept the troops in line. A balance of outside pressure melded with local accommodation to lessen the resentment. Doing for the district, not doing it for Des Moines, became a rallying cry of some teachers. Still, educators suspected underlying political agendas were embedded in the policies. They believed that Iowa politicians long desired a reduction in the number of school districts and the monetary savings this would generate.

Unintended consequences result in extreme focus on standardized test, increased teacher workloads, lowered goals, and reduced community involvement.

Educators discovered four consequences as they implemented the mandates. They felt accountable for things that were beyond their control, a counterproductive focus on standardized testing, presumed problems with state enforcement, and an unexpected loss of community involvement.

First among these concerns was the very concept of accountability. Teachers did not run from accountability. But, they resented being held accountable for factors beyond their control. The realities of poverty and other social variables create testing problems that teachers felt helpless to overcome. Parents who do not allow homework or deny special education help cause teachers to question, "How can I be held accountable for that?" They request reasonable standards of accountability for everyone involved in a child's life

Second, teachers felt that much of a child's education is not measured on standardized tests. The arts, equity, and other issues suffered. This extreme focus would undermine decades of liberal arts education. One leader bemoaned that "what gets measured gets done." She would "not worry about the band until the state starts holding the district accountable for how well the band plays." This narrowing of the curriculum was predicted in the literature review by Popham (2002), Firestone (1989), and others. Additionally, teachers even questioned the test's ability to correctly measure district curriculum in the math, reading, and science. Often, district maps did not align with the standardized tests. Consequently, results were artificially low. As predicted by Popham (2002), districts must either face the consequences of lower scores or align curriculum which teachers to the test.

Educators chaffed under the increased workload. The additional paperwork required by implementation took the form of re-doing curriculum mapping, additional lesson planning, increased technology competence, daily or weekly logs, and others. This paperwork was one of the top reasons nationally for defections from the teaching ranks. Locally, educators reported leaving the profession to join industries. They could make more money for fewer hours. As predicted by the literature review, "accountability and paperwork became the main reasons for leaving the profession." This was incredibly bad news during a teacher shortage. They expected this trend to continue or escalate.

Educational leaders worry about the state's ability to enforce its own mandates. They are skeptical that all districts will abide by the new laws. Smaller districts may be out of compliance already. Stories abound regarding "throwing reports in a box and sending them to the state." Locals wonder how the state reacts. If there is no sanction, why will others comply? If there are sanctions, does the state have the will to close these schools or the capacity to take them over? Leaders have seen precious little dedication by the state in their experiences.

Especially disturbing to locals has been the tendency for districts to reach compliance by setting goals that are more easily attained. Every district originally set high goals. They believed these lofty goals challenged the ingenuity and the imagination of the entire district. When they did not reach all goals, they saw their failures publicized in the newspapers. Rather than risk the bad public relations of failure, the next year goals were set that were easier to accomplish. They believe schools may be lowering their standards to assure that all students attain success--an insurance policy of sorts. This is a sharp contrast to prior goals

that raised the bar of expectation, but also raised the specter of student failure. Even these active schools opted for "better be safe than sorry" and lowered their goals.

Finally, there exists a potential blow to Iowa's history of local control and a fundamental goal of the legislation; loss of community involvement. If one purpose of the legislation was to make Iowa schools more accountable to Iowa communities, educators in active districts see very little evidence of progress in that arena. Despite publishing standardized scores in the newspaper and initiatives to open the classrooms to public scrutiny, leaders report that parents are still more interested in the names of their teachers and whether their kids are having fun at school. District leaders expressed concern about the public's ability or desire to engage in increasingly complex conversations regarding the mandates. As evidence of this trend, districts where involvement was high reported a decrease in community involvement. The tight timelines in year one of the legislation limited involvement and created a poor template for subsequent years. An educator contended "The community may have moved from players in the game to spectators of the game." If true, it was an alarming blow to local control.

Suggestions to improve future legislation: Instability of the legislative system fosters an appreciation of standardized tests and a depreciation of local input.

Teachers and community leaders have three main suggestions for the legislature. First, reduce the reliance on standardized testing. Second, visit schools and talk to locals. Finally, address the institutionalized instability that accompanies legislative control of education.

Educators appeal to the legislature to explore their reliance on standardized tests to determine the effectiveness of schools. Many educators believe the original purpose of the

legislation was to raise standardized test scores to previous historic levels. Education leaders worry that using standardized testing to make high stakes decisions runs the risk of being ineffective, or worse, negatively impacting schools. The literature reveals that high stakes standardized testing has an uncertain history. Berends et al. (2002) warn of "The overwhelming emphasis given to scores on state tests as measures of student improvement do not bode well for reform efforts." Locals sympathize with legislators who struggle to measure the effectiveness of schools. Locals' beliefs are summed up in the words of a superintendent, "Legislators are business people who like numbers and bottom lines. They think these tests will give them that bottom line." However, using the tests in a manner inconsistent with the intent of the test designers is poor practice. Locals warn that teachers will begin to identify strategies that teach to the test. Conversely, others who set goals based on standardized test results fear that they cannot accurately identify strategies to move these scores upward. As a result, several district leaders mentioned that they just set lower goals, a trend that deeply concerns locals. Sirotnik (2002) contends that the only reasons to continue using standardized tests are "economy and efficiency." To reverse this trend, local districts ask for the resources to pursue more sophisticated measures that would better serve Iowa schools.

Educators suggest that legislators do not appreciate the complexity of public schools. Popham (1991) contends that socio-economic factors is a major factor that determines achievement. Poverty, bilingual issues, abuse, and other social problems overwhelm children and pull their attention from standardized tests and learning. In turn, these issues overwhelm teachers. Fewer legislators take the time to visit schools and spend a day walking in a

teacher's shoes to understand the nature of Iowa's children. Teachers believe that few industries are successfully run by policy makers who do not understand the business.

Educators believe that a lack of stability hinders school planning and policy implementation. Locals contend the sentiments of the legislature change at each election. New Policy makers take office and" make their bones" by putting their stamp on the biggest part of the state budget, local schools. This bi-yearly ebb and flow makes long-range planning almost impossible for schools. Educators wonder if elections will provide supportive legislators or skeptics of public education. If legislators want what one superintendent called "dynamic leadership in schools," they must clearly identify what they want educators to do, provide funding, and explain their vision for Iowa education. They must create the same type of stable environment for Iowa's schools that they desire for Iowa's classrooms.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* warned that American education was unfocused and falling behind other nations. Iowa responded to the demand for more accountability from schools by passing Iowa House File 2272. This qualitative study was an effort to describe these improvement efforts from the perspective of three active Iowa schools.

The purpose of the study was to provide information about what happened during implementation of HF 2272 and what implementers would recommend for future policy design. Insights were offered to other implementers concerning how these active districts took on the job of implementing policy.

Five research questions were addressed in this study:

1. How familiar are middle school practitioners with House File 2272?
2. What does House File 2272 require schools to do?
3. What is the expertise and interest of school personnel responsible for implementation of the effort?
4. What strategies are school administrators and teachers using to transform House File 2272 into practice?
5. What are the suggestions of middle school practitioners to improve policy and implementation of HF 2272?

Conclusions

The study identified six conclusions with respect to its five major questions. Conclusions emerge regarding: (a) middle school educator's familiarity with HF 2272, (b) impact of local expertise and interest on implementation of HF 2272, (c) requirements of HF 2272, (d) strategies used to transform policy into practice, and (e) suggestions to improve policy and implementation.

The first conclusion centered on the first research question. Investigation revealed the means by which educators became familiar with HF 2272 and how these early perceptions shaped policy implementation at the local level:

Say What You Mean - It Does Make a Difference in the Outcome.

The study clearly revealed an early enthusiastic greeting for the concept of increased accountability and hints of increased funding in exchange for compliance. However, the state produced no identifiable mechanism to easily diffuse the details of the message to school districts. Consequently, district efforts to understand the legislation relied on the slow leaking of details through a variety of conduits. Minus any "big picture" explanation of school improvement from the legislature, teachers created their understanding from sketchy newspaper articles, education associations' emails, and word of mouth. Educators believed the legislature felt Iowa's educational status was at stake and raising standardized test scores was the primary remedy.

Despite a lack of clarity, tight timelines required district leaders to interpret the policy locally and begin acting. Teachers traditionally felt limited power to raise these standardized scores. When this perceived "testing fear" was coupled with a lack of new money for the initiatives, a vacuum of trust opened between the educators and the legislature. Educators

filled the vacuum with suspicions of underlying political motives for the legislation. Many educators came to suspect the purpose of the legislation was to enact vouchers or close small Iowa schools.

The study's second question examined the expertise and interest of school personnel in implementing HF 2272. The following conclusion emerged from the findings:

The Rich Get Richer Cycle -Active Leaders Produce Splashes of Activity That Attract Other Active Leaders.

For years, visionary leaders were recruited to these active school districts. Before HF 2272, and increasingly after, leaders were hired to create learning communities and were provided resources to build capacity. These leaders are the strategic interactors discussed in the literature. They organized districts into teams with vertical and horizontal communications systems and practiced converting new initiatives into staff development at the classroom level. These leaders sat at the helm of sleek, agile districts accustomed to change.

In addition, these leaders were involved in committees that helped design the legislation. Therefore, districts with strategic interactors suffered less from the tangled lines of communication at the onset of HF 2272. They understood the new law, took control of the message and fit of mandates to local culture. This close fit resulted in what many of the teachers referred to as the "natural feel" of the changes. The Area Education Association and State Department personnel came to view these visionary environments and encouraged other schools to visit. Their reputation grew.

This reputation attracted other quality leaders and teachers to this active environment. This mix of quality professionals, an appetite for change, and reputation for excellence

incubated these learning communities. Conversely, interactors express pessimism for colleagues in less active districts. They openly doubted the ability of small districts to respond effectively.

The following two conclusions were related to the third research question, regarding the perceptions of what HF 2272 caused schools to do and the resulting effects:

Regardless of Original Intent, HF 2272 Increased Bureaucracy and Decreased Professionalism.

A lack of input and feedback to the legislature caused many educators classify HF 2272 as a top-down policy from faraway Des Moines. Teachers resented the paper accountability that followed the new law. Teachers increasingly suspected that legislators did not understand the schools they governed as implementation forced teachers to work at night and on weekends without reimbursement.

As predicted in the literature review, top-down mandates moved Iowa toward standardizing compliance. But, teachers lamented a loss of autonomy and decision making power in their classrooms. Evidence of dissatisfaction grew as teachers began leaving the profession during a teacher shortage. As noted in the literature, increased accountability and paperwork were the main reasons teachers left the profession. As one veteran educator complained, "They [the legislature] don't come up with a good support systems, so I guess they don't care."

If you Wanted to Make Schools More Accountable to Communities, What Happened?

These active communities successfully engineered school improvement endeavors long before HF 2272. For years, these communities built school capacity by pouring financial and environmental support into their schools. They volunteered, provided a stable flow of

money, and provided well-fed and compliant children. They expressed their satisfaction and pride with the passage of bond issues and levies.

However, educators noted that the unreasonable timelines of HF 2272 greatly limited opportunities to network with the public. This created a poor first year template for implementation in future years. In addition, the law increased complexity and requirements for compliance. This complexity limited public understanding and input. One superintendent lamented the loss of input and noted that the new accountability created less community involvement than ever before.

The next conclusion is related to the fourth research question, exploring how school personnel are transforming HF 2272 into practice in the field:

HF 2272 Redefined the Measuring Stick for Excellence in Education.

Perceptions shaped at the announcement of HF 2272 created extreme public focus on high stakes testing. Educators implored legislators to rethink matching high stakes to a single, standardized measure of success. Educators contended that many of the factors lowering standardized testing scores were beyond their control. The resulting feeling of helplessness fueled fear of failure and bad public relations.

The strategic response to this fear caused all three active schools to discuss lower, more easily achievable goals. Two districts discussed the risk and "just lowered our academic goals." In addition, the emphasis on standardized testing narrowed the curriculum. This limited emphasis endangered or completely eliminated pedagogy initiatives, the arts, equity initiatives, and previous staff development. Non-core staff encountered difficulty participating effectively and vocalized a "second class citizen" status. They question their continuing support of core-only initiatives.

The final conclusion sets forth suggestions to the legislature. The research reveals teacher perceptions of the state role in educational policy making:

If Legislators Intend to Improve Iowa Education, as an Education First State, They Need to be More Attentive to Their Policymaking Role.

Local educators fear that a critical lack of resources and unexpectedly complex educational systems will reduce the legislature's will to "stay the course" with accountability. Teachers felt that flip-flops indicated increasing indecision from the top, a major concern in a top-down mandate. Teachers also complain that ever-changing rules discourage flexibility in local implementation. Many educators tire of starting over and finally acquiesced by stating "just tell me what to do." This surrender of local implementation flexibility threatens the very core of the change process. Fullan (1991) contends "policymakers must help practitioners put practices into local use." An administrator fears this abdication of the responsibility by stating, "If they quit now, we may not be able to lead again."

Implications

The following implications were drawn from this study but are the researcheer's interpretation of data and trends.

Implementation is Hindered by Communication Problems

A critical lack of formal communication systems exists between the legislature and Iowa schools. As a result, existence of multiple informal pathways distort messages from the legislature. Active schools reported benefits from their early knowledge of legislative intent. Schools that can afford to send personnel to Des Moines for legislative networking will stay

"in the know." Schools without the means to crack inner circles of policy making will rely on rumor to guide their actions. Additionally, a lack of networking between districts further isolates Iowa schools.

The control of the message is implicitly the responsibility of the legislature. Legislators must communicate clearly and inform Iowa's districts in an organized, timely manner. In addition, the lack of feedback from schools prevents midcourse adjustments. Legislation becomes inflexible in the face of changing environments. Legislators are unable to take advantage of innovations or retreat from failures. This lack of organized data collection causes legislators to "fly blindly" from one policy action to the next. Each disconnected policy initiative accumulates upon the last until teachers flounder under the weight.

Standardized Tests Results in Math, Science, and Reading Will Increase

Iowa education received a clear message from the legislature: increase standardized test scores. Districts worked to align district curriculum to standardized tests. This intensive focus on core areas and the publication of standardized test results will alter traditional funding streams to enrich these endeavors. As a result, achievement in the core will improve. Without additional funding, the fine arts, activities programs, diversified staff development, equity issues, and other traditional local efforts will be legislated into irrelevance.

Districts are Shifting Resources from Capacity Building to Compliance

Iowa schools exhibit differing capacities to adapt to this changing workload. Active districts will continue to shift resources away from capacity building toward insuring

standardized compliance. Fear of public failure will shift emphasis from risk-taking to ensuring compliance. These districts will feel less active as a result. Years of capacity building aimed at enabling change are being transformed into a capacity to meet compliance standards.

Accountability is burying Iowa schools in a blizzard of paperwork. Intense concern exists for the plight of smaller, less active districts. These districts have no history or real hope of buying the leadership capacity, powerful staff development, time, or expertise to achieve the required paper accountability. Teachers will continue to leave less active schools or leave the profession entirely. Without capacity to change or a stable staff, less active districts will be legislated out of existence. As a result, teachers perceive the legislators as indifferent to their plight, or worse yet, designers of a plot to "work" smaller, less active districts out of existence.

Recommendations

Don't Abandon Schools: Create Feedback System Between the Statehouse and the Schoolhouse

Fullan and others contend that public schools require mandates to jump-start improvement. They also recommend a flexible policy design that allows implementers to adjust policy to unique local needs. This complex design model requires continual data analysis and adjustment of policy options to changing condition. Time constraints, politics, and Iowa's antiquated lines of communication hinder or completely stymie these conversations.

- To ensure that the policy matches the legislative intent, provide the personnel and time necessary for effective networking between the legislature and the Department of Education.
- "Even the playing field" by providing the technology necessary for effective dissemination of policy details to all Iowa schools.
- Value the feedback from schools by collecting and analyzing data. Then, make the inevitable midcourse corrections accompanying change.

Create a Flexible Legislative Response to Accommodate the Varying Capacities of Iowa Schools

If Ed-Flex was good for Iowa as a whole, it should be good for individual Iowa schools. Create a flexible legislative approach to accountability that is sensitive to the variable capacities of Iowa's schools. When considering the possible policy response responses identified in the literature:

- Create mandates that require continual improvement from all Iowa schools.
- Reward the expensive research and development provided by active districts to the Department of Education and all Iowa schools. Incentivize the active districts by reducing their paper accountability and create teacher ladders and grant opportunities.
- Provide less active districts with the capacity building opportunities previously enjoyed by active districts. Provide funding for quality leadership, staff development, teaming, and networking opportunities.
- Avoid restructuring less active schools by eliminating staff. Results are at best a wash and at worst counterproductive.

Schools Sway with the Political Wind. Increase the Likelihood of Long-range Planning or Turn the Responsibility Over to Someone Who Can

Educators bemoaned the biyearly change of direction at election time. Depoliticize the process by decreasing the flip-flops each election brings. Either increase term limits of legislators or turn more educational planning over to entities with a longer lifespan. Each legislature exists for 2 years. Governors are elected for 4 years. Members of the Iowa State Board of Education are appointed by the governor and serve for 6 years with the possibility of concurrent terms totaling 12 years. The State Board of Education was intended by the Iowa constitution to be a policy making body on behalf of the legislature. The longer terms of the State Board provide more stability and continuity than legislative terms. Give the State Board and similar entities more voice in the creation of long-range policy.

Honor Capacity Where It Exists and Create Capacity Where It Does Not Exist

Study capacity building strategies employed in active districts. Emulate those strategies by:

- Building capacity by investing in leadership statewide. Concentrate on leadership programming which creates the "strategic interactors" so necessary for the translation of state policy into local implementation.
- Continue to invest in Area Education Association staff development services valued by active schools.
- Assure that staff development reaches the classroom by providing the resources necessary for teams of teachers to practice new strategies.

- Invest in alternatives to standardized tests which broaden the curriculum and value diverse offerings.

If there is no intent to create new funding, rearrange present funding. If legislative intent is to shift funding from small schools by closing them, as the teachers recommended, "Just do it."

A Call for Future Research Studies

Replicate this study in less active districts. A broader study would allow identification of implementation patterns across differing districts. Differences between practices, funding patterns, and staff development practices could be compared with suggestions for improvement.

How Has HF 2272 Improved Student Achievement?

Sufficient time has passed to begin analyzing the implementation success of HF 2272. More importantly, studies should reveal the relationships between levels of implementation and changes in standardized test scores. This data can be used to guide further implementation efforts.

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APPENDIX A

Interviewee Consent Form

Research Study: Transforming Iowa Schools: An Inside Look at Educational Accountability Policy

The purpose of this funded research study is to study the process of school transformation in Iowa by conducting a policy implementation study of Iowa's comprehensive school improvement and accountability mandate. In its simplest form this research project asks two questions: (a) How is Iowa's mandate for school improvement actually working? (b) How could it be redesigned to work better? A research team is interviewing approximately 120 people, including state legislators, teachers, administrators, and state and local policy makers who have been identified as the people best able to respond to these questions.

The interviews are approximately 45 minutes in length and are being conducted in the fall of 2001 and the spring of 2002. The findings of the study will be made public; however, your name and position will not be used and the data will not be reported in any way that you can be identified. Your signature indicates you understand the purpose and process of the study and that you give us permission to use the information in disseminating the results.

Please be aware that your participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to decide not to participate or withdraw at any time without repercussion. If you have any questions regarding the study or participation in it, please feel free to contact us at the

number listed below. Also we will be happy to share our finding from the study when it is completed.

Date: _____

Interviewee Name (please print): _____

Interviewee Position (please print): _____

Interviewee Signature: _____

Research Team: Perry JohnstonAnnette Liggett Jennifer Lindaman

Carole Richardson Kim Thuente Denny Wulf

Research Team Member Signature: _____

Drake University Phone Number: (515) 271-3719

APPENDIX B

HF 2272 Implementation Study

Interview Protocol

Draft 11/19/02

Board Member Version

From what you know, what was 2272 intended to do.

- How did you learn about 2272, at first and as it unfolded?
- Tell me about any ways that you think the district is really different as a result of 2272.
    - How has your district's plan impacted your role as a board member? Are you more or less involved in school improvement?
    - How has it changed the work of your administrators? Your teachers?
    - Is there a greater focus on goals, benchmarks, student achievement, etc.?

Do you feel your staff had the necessary resources and skills to implement your district's goals?

- What did your district do to help your staff develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed?
    - Were these pretty much in place prior to 2272 or were they more a result of 2272?
- Do you feel that your school provided the necessary resources such as time, money, expertise to implement 2272?

- Were these pretty much in place prior to 2272 or were they more a result of 2272?
- Do you see this as a funded or unfounded mandate?

• Do you feel HF 2272 served to "jump start" your district's reform efforts or did it supplement what you were already doing?

- Did 2272 divert time and resources from other reform efforts going on in the district before it was passed?

Share with me the process your district utilized to implement HF 2272.

• What were some of the supports to the implementation process?

- Were these pretty much in place prior to 2272 or were they more a result of 2272?

• What were some of the barriers to the implementation process?

- Are these much the same barriers both before and after 2272?

• What might you suggest to do differently the next time around?

Why do you think the legislature enacted HF 2272?

• What do you think they saw as the need?

• Do you think they are getting what they hoped for?

• From your experience with 2272, what do you recommend to legislators about how to make legislation helpful to districts?

- What would recommend to legislators in future implementation efforts?

APPENDIX C

HF 2272 Implementation Study

Interview Protocol

Draft 11/19/01

Teacher Version

From what you know, what was 2272 intended to do?

- How did you learn about 2272, at first and as it unfolded?
- Tell me about any ways that you think the district is really different as a result of 2272.
    - How has your district's plan impacted your role as a teacher?
    - Would you say your school is more capable and willing to take on new changes in the future?

Do you feel you had the necessary resources and skills to implement your district's goals?

- What did your district do to help you and/or others develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed?
    - Were these pretty much in place prior to 2272 or were they more a result of 2272?
- Do you feel that your school provided the necessary resources such as time, money, expertise to implement 2272?
    - Were these pretty much in place prior to 2272 or were they more a result of 2272?

- Do you feel HF 2272 served to "jump start" your district's reform efforts or did it supplement what you were already doing?
    - Did 2272 divert time and resources from other reform efforts going on in the district before it was passed?

Share with me the process your district utilized to implement HF 2272.

- What were some of the supports to the implementation process?
    - Were these pretty much in place prior to 2272 or were they more a result of 2272?
- What were some of the barriers to the implementation process?
    - Are these much the same barriers both before and after 2272?
- What might you suggest to do differently the next time around?

Why do you think the legislature enacted HF 2272?

- What do you think they saw as the need?
- Do you think they are getting what they hoped for?
- From your experience with 2272, what do you recommend to legislators about how to make legislation helpful to districts?
    - What would recommend to legislators in future implementation efforts?

APPENDIX D

HF 2272 Implementation Study

Interview Protocol

Draft 11/19/01

Administrator Version

From what you know, what was 2272 intended to do?

- How did you learn about 2272, at first and as it unfolded?
- Tell me about any ways that you think the district is really different as a result of 2272.
    - How has your district's plan impacted your role as an administrator/board member?
    - Would you say your district is more capable and willing to take on new changes in the future?

Do you feel your staff had the necessary resources and skills to implement your district's goals?

- What did your district do to help you and/or others develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed?
    - Were these pretty much in place prior to 2272 or were they more a result of 2272?
- Do you feel that your school provided the necessary resources such as time, money, expertise to implement 2272?

- Were these pretty much in place prior to 2272 or were they more a result of 2272?

• Do you feel HF 2272 served to "jump start" your district's reform efforts or did it supplement what you were already doing?

- Did 2272 divert time and resources from other reform efforts going on in the district before it was passed?

Share with me the process your district utilized to implement HF 2272.

• What were some of the supports to the implementation process?

- Were these pretty much in place prior to 2272 or were they more a result of 2272?

• What were some of the barriers to the implementation process?

- Are these much the same barriers both before and after 2272?

• What might you suggest to do differently the next time around?

Why do you think the legislature enacted HF 2272?

• What do you think they saw as the need?

• Do you think they are getting what they hoped for?

• From your experience with 2272, what do you recommend to legislators about how to make legislation helpful to districts?

- What would recommend to legislators in future implementation efforts?

APPENDIX E

House File 2272

HF 2272

PAG LIN

HOUSE FILE 2272

AN ACT

REQUIRING THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION TO ADOPT RULES RELATING TO THE INCORPORATION OF ACCOUNTABILITY FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT INTO THE EDUCATION STANDARDS AND ACCREDITATION PROCESS.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF IOWA:

Section 1. Section 256.7, Code 1997, is amended by adding the following new subsection:

NEW SUBSECTION. 21. Develop and adopt rules by July 1, 1999, incorporating accountability for student achievement into the standards and accreditation process described in section 256.11. The rules shall provide for all of the following:

a. Requirements that all school districts and accredited nonpublic schools develop, implement, and file with the department a comprehensive school improvement plan that includes, but is not limited to, demonstrated school, parental, and community involvement in assessing educational needs, establishing local education standards and student achievement levels, and, as applicable, the consolidation of federal and state planning, goal-setting, and reporting requirements.

b. A set of core academic indicators in mathematics and reading in grades four, eight, and eleven, a set of core academic indicators in science in grades eight and eleven, and another set of core indicators that includes, but is not limited to, graduation rate, postsecondary education, and successful employment in Iowa. Annually, the department shall report state data for each indicator in the condition of education report.

c. A requirement that all school districts and accredited nonpublic schools annually report to the department and the local community the district-wide progress made in attaining student achievement goals on the academic and other core indicators and the district-wide progress made in attaining locally established student learning goals. The school districts and accredited nonpublic schools shall demonstrate the use of multiple assessment measures in determining student achievement levels. The school districts and accredited nonpublic schools may report on other locally determined factors influencing student achievement. The school districts and accredited nonpublic schools shall also report to the local community their results by individual attendance center.

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RON J. CORBETT
Speaker of the House

_____

MARY E. KRAMER
President of the Senate

I hereby certify that this bill originated in the House and is known as House File 2272, Seventy-seventh General Assembly.

_____

ELIZABETH ISAACSON
Chief Clerk of the House

Approved _____, 1998

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TERRY E. BRANSTAD
Governor

Signed by Governor Branstad on May 6, 1998.